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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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A STUDY OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A LITERARY ARTIST

BY

ALEXANDER HARVEY

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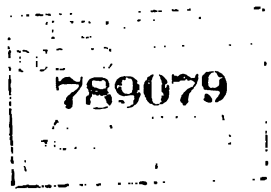

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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

I

THE LITERARY SUPERSTITION THAT MAKES NECESSARY AN INTERPRETATION OF HOWELLS

I AM setting out upon an interpretation of the work of William Dean Howells with incidental reference to the British literary superstition because that superstition has left his art an unheeded glory of our country. The literary art of Howells is no less precious a portion of our national patrimony than Harvard or the Mississippi and it is time we regarded him, therefore, as something more than a "successful writer." This must seem an extravagant way of speaking to those only among our people who are under the spell of what the French call "arrivism," the worship of material suc-

cess. We Americans are taught to ignore those glories of our land which do not rate themselves commercially. The taxable value of New York city real estate is impressive to us because it can be set down in dollars and cents and still it would be better to lose it all, to have it wiped out, than to lose such a national asset as "The Rise of Silas Lapham." I am not in the least disconcerted by my knowledge that this method of approaching the subject must amuse the manufacturers of automobiles.

There is also another difficulty. The literature of our country has from time to time been patronized by men and women of culture. It is taken too readily for granted that disparagement of American writers and glorification of European classics give our critics a right to their own imbecility. We have all thus become afraid to take American prose and poetry very seriously. The truth is that the American literary artist is entitled to higher rank than his European contemporary. In Eng-

land, at any rate in our century, the number of artists in literature steadily declines. I dislike the use of that word "literature," for the English have made it somewhat ridiculous. For the great difficulty with American literature is the attitude of contempt for it which so many Americans imagine to be an evidence of their own culture.

Those who profess this contempt have apparently made no comparative investigations of their own. He who, having studied the literature of our country with care, announces his contempt for it, should cite illustrations in defense of his view. Nor should comparisons be carried back to a remote antiquity. It is fair to compare our literature in the nineteenth century with that of any other country in the nineteenth century, but it is absurd to compare our literature as a whole with that of, say, France as a whole. Facile and superficial comparisons of the kind, unsupported by adequate illustrations, are fashionable among criticasters whose reputations are serious only to the un-

discriminating. Let us look at them, as Dante says, and pass on unheeding.

There has grown with us a theory, or convention, that God has denied to Americans the faculty that makes possible the creation of great literature. This delusion is promoted by a significant accident. Our people, even our well educated people, live in systematized ignorance of the accumulated treasures of the national literature. In every great European country the accumulated treasures of the national literature are accessible to all in artistic and substantial form at a price that is almost nominal. The American gets a few of his country's classics when, and only when, it enters the head of some London publisher to put one of them into his popular library of "masterpieces." Such is the rule, with a few exceptions.

We are about where we were when Charles Dickens in this country made himself very condescending to Edgar Allan Poe. Poor Poe called upon Dickens in the hope of meeting a

man who could understand. A mistake could not be greater than that of the young American writer who seeks out a British author in the hope of getting a little encouragement or advice. In nine cases out of ten the Briton will assure the American that the writers of the United States have no standards. When the American asks what "standards" are he will be favored as a rule with a dissertation upon his own incapacity to understand such a subject. The Briton is firmly convinced that he has what he is pleased to call standards. He has no doubt of his own capacity to sit in judgment upon American literature and to pronounce it beneath contempt.

II

THE CRITICAL FACULTY OF THE ENGLISH

THE conduct of the English in thus assuming to pass judgment upon the literature of any nation whatever, their own included, has long been a source of amusement to the continent of Europe. It is thoroughly understood on the continent that the literature of those English, viewed as a whole and making allowances for exceptional achievements, is second rate. In philosophy, for example, the literature of the English is negligible. In the drama, English literature outside of Shakespeare is unimportant compared with that of the other great European nations generally. In fiction the English have produced no novelist of the rank of Balzac, no writer of tales who can compare in artistry with Poe or de

Maupassant. In the field of criticism the English can sustain no comparison whatever with the continent of Europe. Even in their Shakespearean criticism as in their study of the classics of antiquity, the English trudge after the continent of Europe.

The truth is that the English are not a nation of artists at all and the literature of their philosophy justifies a suspicion that they are not a nation of thinkers. From this point of view, it is significant that the English are not the pioneers of the several scientific revolutions that transform the world as we watch it. The English did not give us the aeroplane or the Zeppelin. We do not owe synthetic chemistry to the English. They did not make the pioneer discoveries that led to "the new knowledge" in physics—radium emanations. They had nothing to do with the extraordinary advance in our knowledge of all heredity which goes by the name of Mendelism. The new psychology is not English nor is the theory of mutations which brought such renown to de

Vries. The state to which science is reduced in England now is a disgrace, even from the standpoint of the low intellectual level of the Anglo-Saxon.

There is nothing to wonder at in the fact, therefore, that the critical judgments of the English are received with little respect on the continent of Europe when those judgments have to do with the arts and the sciences. It is thoroughly understood on the continent of Europe that the English mind is second rate, that the English themselves are not a nation of artists and that their criticism of the achievement of even a Hottentot with the pencil need disturb no one. Nothing, consequently, is more amusing than the respect with which Americans trained in our universities and addicting themselves to literature receive the critical judgments of the English in regard to both poetry and prose. If the English declare that in literature the Americans have no "standards," the assertion is received as if the English themselves had standards or were com-

petent to decide what shall or shall not be standards in literature or the arts.[1]

To those who have paid no particular attention to the matter, it may seem incredible that American opinion on the subject of greatness in literature is virtually made in England, but such is the case. Never does it occur to the American mind, apparently, to ask for evidence of the capacity of the English to pass judgment upon our literature in this style, or upon the literature of any country at all, for that matter, their own included. Now, it would be difficult to say which is more striking, the preposterous character of the average English judgment of our literature or the tone of pontifical finality with which that judgment is pronounced. I have seen almost the whole of Poe's work in both prose and verse dismissed in a great London daily as beneath contempt.

Nor are the judgments of the average

[1] The point is well brought out by Howells in such works as "My Literary Passions" and "Criticism and Fiction." Times have changed for the worse since those books were written.

William Dean Howells

American critic on the subject of the relation of our literature to that of the English a bit less extraordinary. I saw the other day in the "literary" supplement of a big New York daily the statement—made with perfect gravity—that "it was in England that Poe's genius found its first and highest appreciation." Again, if London dailies all agree that Mr. So-and-So is the greatest living English novelist, the verdict is accepted with perfect confidence by the head of the department of literature at an American university. Never would it occur to the head of the department of literature at any American university that the English are entirely incompetent to decide who is or who isn't their greatest living novelist.

The English did not know who their greatest painter is until they learned his name on the continent of Europe. The English did not know who their greatest poet was until the continent of Europe afforded them a clue. The critical faculty of the English is in such a state that Europe as a whole would not accept Eng-

land's verdict on one of her own writers. That is why this country is the paradise of the British mediocrity. The English quack thinker, the English quack poet, the English quack novelist, the English quack essayist, the English quack critic and the English quack scholar, drive a brisk trade over here by dealing in the greatness of one another.

These quacks are the moral successors of those Englishmen who in the Victorian period appeared in our homes in the capacity of aristocrats. They were quack aristocrats. They gave themselves out as scions of the house of Cavendish. They affected a profound contempt for the judgment of the Americans, for the ideas of the Americans, for the culture of the Americans. By the time these English had decamped with the cash of their entertainers, it transpired that they did not belong to the house of Cavendish. The credentials of those Englishmen were written by quacks like themselves. They seemed to be real aristocrats because of their contempt for America,

just as an English writer seems to some of our college professors to be a great critic because he despises Poe.[1]

Our young American writers, then, should not heed the British poet or the British critic over here who tells them that we have no standards and no literature. The statement may be true. The continent of Europe would not accept such a statement as true, merely because the English said it.

Why should we?

Let there be no toleration henceforth of the

[1] I allow myself the luxury of quoting what Howells says of the English in his clever Italian tale "A Fearful Responsibility," published by Houghton Mifflin Co.:

"'I have been wondering if, in his phenomenal way, he is not a final expression of the national genius—the stupid contempt for the rights of others; the tacit denial of the rights of any people who are not at English mercy; the assumption that the courtesies and decencies of life are for use exclusively towards Englishmen.'

"This was in that embittered old war time: we have since learned how forbearing and generous and amiable Englishmen are; how they never take advantage of any one they believe stronger than themselves, or fail in consideration for those they imagine their superiors; how you have but to show yourself successful in order to win their respect, and even affection."—*A Fearful Responsibility*, edition of 1881, page 100.

attitude which has been "caught" like an infection by our critics. Our critics are the young men and women who are found patronizing American authors—patronizing William Dean Howells himself, telling us that even Edgar Allan Poe would not find publication for his tales to-day—as if that statement, supposing it to be accurate, were anything but disgraceful to our country's taste. It is all part of the paradox that our periodicals, our publishers, our editors, our newspapers are, on the whole, enemies of our literature. There is little to choose between them, but our newspapers, on the whole, are the most important of the many American enemies of American literature.

They contrive to invest our literature with a dullness altogether gratuitous. I defy any man of letters, to say nothing of the average reader, to scan the "reviews" in an ordinary American daily without getting the impression that books must be dull. If a work of fiction be under consideration, for instance, do we get a vivid characterization of the heroine from the

standpoint of her wit, her beauty or her intelligence? Not a bit of it! The hero of a novel may dazzle even the villain with the quality of his epigrams, but not one of them will ever be quoted that we may discern the author's mettle.

The atmosphere of a novel, its "note," the attitude to life it discloses and its realization of its particular mood are not hinted. Newspaper reviewers in our country are fond of the early Victorian terms "plot," and "originality," whatever the things are. A book review in an American newspaper is either a display of impertinence to an author or of ill-breeding to the public. The offense of the newspaper book review is usually that of affected sophistication. This sophistication is on a level with that of Mrs. Wilfer. When the rich man's liveried lackey came to her humble abode, Mrs. Wilfer stared him haughtily out of countenance, lest he suspect she had never seen a liveried lackey before. She is one of a numerous class, seen everywhere. Such people complain of the spoons and the napkins at the club.

Reviewers

They have never been accustomed to anything really nice in their lives, but with their loud complaints they try to convey an impression that they dine with Lucullus all the time.

In precisely that fashion the newspaper book reviewer tries to impress us with his culture by picking flaws here and there in points of detail. Any one who understands criticism at all is aware that taste and judgment are manifested in the discovery of an unsuspected merit rather than in the proclamation of a glaring defect. Moreover, a work of art is to be criticised primarily from its own point of view and not from the point of view of an enemy of its school or class. It would be unfair to Homer to ask Poe, who despised epics, to review the Iliad. Similarly, it is unfair to our literature to submit it to the judgment of the newspapers.

An American newspaper is obliged to reflect the native American Philistinisms, the native American awe of alien literature and the conventional American contempt for American literature. Naturally, American newspapers

cannot admit this as a true statement of their attitude any more than they could admit a challenge of their conventional assumption that the American people are the friends of freedom and democracy. Let us, then, glance at the facts: let us see what names in literature are popularized by American newspapers. Let us see whether American literature is related to American life by American newspapers or whether they relate an alien literature to our life, not casually but all the time.

The greatest living artist in the field of fiction who uses the English language happens to be an American. He happens also to be William Dean Howells.

In the sheer artistry of his style, in the subtlety of his delineation of character and in his sway over his readers he far surpasses, taking his work as a whole, any living British novelist. The career and the capacity of this man render his views of certain aspects of the world crisis not only important, but timely. We don't get them. We have instead, as part of the cabled

news of the day, the obviously ill informed puerilities of a British novelist whose genius is to me doubtful.

The American novelist may get a paragraph on a Saturday when he brings out a book, or his face may look out at us of a Sunday when, in the "magazine section," he is permitted to say a word or two about "literature as a career" and other imbecilities which it happens to be convenient at the moment to lay upon his lips.

Not so long ago William Dean Howells received a pretty and becoming tribute from his fellows in literature and the arts. It was an event, American in character, literary in its interest, important as an item of news. A few of our newspapers did pay a little attention to the episode, but the vast majority ignored it completely as an item of the day's news. I cannot say that I was surprised by this. At or about this time one of England's "great" writers—in an American newspaper office greatness in literature is decided by London—made an ordinary remark. It was sent here

by cable as part of the day's news. It formed the subject of much editorial reflection. The British author who said this ordinary thing is on a level with the Britons whose "poems" are occasionally cabled here and printed on the front pages of our daily morning gazettes. For nothing can shake the conviction of the American newspaper man, apparently, that all the "great writers" of the Anglo-Saxon world are British subjects.

By a coincidence it happens that not only is the supreme artist among novelists using the English language an American, but the supreme artist among critics as well. I have looked vainly through the columns which in newspapers are called "literary" for any allusions, the very slightest, to his really striking and original views even when topics are uppermost upon which among the judicious he is a most high authority.[1] Second-rate Britons will be quoted with all the deference due to a writer of the rank of Edgar Allan Poe.

[1] I refer to William Crary Brownell.

A Paradox

Newspaper "literature" is thus about as valuable as newspaper "science." This paradox of newspaper "literature" is easily explained. The "literary" columns of our newspapers comprise, speaking generally, a device for the procuration of publishers' advertisements, and of patronage of a kindred nature. No one with a feeling for literature as related to life has to be told that a few of our newspapers cherish a literary tradition with a sense of responsibility to a more or less literary constituency. Such newspapers not only review books ably and impartially, they make an effort to relate literature in some practical way to the lives of their readers. This is the detail that is so fatal to our newspapers in general. If a publisher took it into his head to ask the average newspaper what it had ever done to relate literature to the daily life of the community, he would be referred in all simplicity to the "literary" columns. These columns, aside from their main purpose in procuring publishers' advertisements, have the incidental

effect of confirming the popular impression that "literature" is remote and aloof from the practical realities of everyday life, an "elegant thing to have" but on the whole dull and unintelligible when it can be viewed seriously at all.

Above the braying Philistinism of the only literary atmosphere American newspapers know anything about ride those radiant angels, the popular novelists and playwrights of London, whose pontifical right to speak infallibly on a question of faith or morals is so well known to our mobs.

All this would be a spiritual as well as an intellectual tragedy even if, as our business men say, there were "money in it." The curious part of this newspaper crusade for publishers' advertisements is the fact that, in the long run, there is no money in it. There is no money in it because publishing in our land is based for the most part upon a theory fundamentally false, and historically absurd, an assumption that flies in the face of human experience. This error of theory, this wrong assumption is

that an alien literature can be related in any proper sense to the life of the American people. Our publishing houses have no literary constituencies at all. They can sell sets of this standard author or that reference book. They flounder in the task of finding an audience and they invariably seek not their own audience but the audience of somebody else. The author who gets attention in a publishing house is he who walks in with an audience, a following, a buying constituency. It matters little what kind of a constituency it may be. The publisher himself either has no constituency of his own or he has bled it white. And that constituency, as I said, is not a literary one at all, properly speaking.

The only important literary constituency we have is that body of native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin to whom the contemporary literature of Britain arrives in the trappings and with the glamor still upon it of the age of Elizabeth, of the Georgian period, of the mid-Victorian era. These people have no

means of knowing that the literature of England is living to-day on the prestige of its own past. This explains how Britons of no genius emerge so radiantly in the "literary" columns of our newspapers. They want the publishers' advertisement, those newspapers do! The same aching desire accounts for the flood of Russians in translation. Russians have written some good stories. When the "important young Englishman" trick was played to death in New York publishing houses, and when the pose of the London playwright in his capacity as sovereign pontiff seemed solemn only in a Sunday newspaper, the Russian game was revived. Statements of a preposterous character about these Russian writers began to appear in the newspapers. The fact is that most of these Russian novels that have come to us in recent years are unreadable but our college professors dare not say so lest they be thought deficient in the "critical" faculty. The newspaper men, as a rule, dare not say it for very obvious reasons, even if their opinions

had importance. Russian novelists will continue to be treated in that pompous, stilted fashion of reviewing which some newspaper men catch from the circulars sent to them by the publishers. There has been a development of this trick in recent years. An ambitious booklet will be sent to the reviewers and in it they can read about the "greatness" of "the master." A "great" English "master" plays this trick by writing a book about some literary acquaintance of his who is also "great." The thing is done in the most serious way imaginable and the newspaper men here take it seriously.

There is with ourselves, too, a prejudice against "literary men," who are assumed to be absurd persons. They reflect back upon literature itself a shade of their own absurdity. Literature is accordingly left to "ladies" or perhaps I ought to say to women and children. I am personally acquainted with "literary" men who deliberately use strong oaths and strong cigars and frequent bar rooms for the sake of seeming manly. It is all part of a per-

fectly ridiculous state of mind. These men are posing. As a part of this pose we have the disdain of our literature which affects to regard it as second rate, which asks again and again when that "great American novel" will be written, which snatches up every light and unconsidered trifle coming to us from abroad, which declines to take seriously even so great a writer as William Dean Howells.

He was never discovered in Europe. That is why we do not rank him among the supreme literary artists, like Poe, for instance. I am well aware of the fact that the work of Howells is enjoyed in England, that he is known on the continent of Europe itself as an author. Howells has never, for all that, been "estimated" by the English. That is because he is an artist and in literature the English are not artists. Dickens, for example, is not a literary artist, although he is a great novelist. Anthony Trollope is not a literary artist, although he, too, is a great novelist. The artist in literature is found chiefly among the French. The

literary artist must not be confused with the "great writer," although "great" writing is essential to the effect of inspired artistry in literature.

That word "artist" is as dreadful in its implications as is the word "literature" itself. It implies that Howells must be "above the heads" of most of us. The supreme artist is never above the heads of the multitude. His methods may be superseded. The qualities which gave him his hold upon the hearts and the admiration of his contemporaries may not endear him to us. He may be despised by the aristocrats and worshipped by the mob. Hokusai is an instance of this. The great artist of the color print was scorned by all courtiers. To this day the arbiters of Japanese "taste" do not give him the highest rank. It will be recalled that Shakespeare, who never got above the heads of the crowd in the pit of the Globe theater, was patronized and tolerated by the exponents of the best taste in his own time. There was a schoolmaster at Athens in the time

of Alcibiades who "corrected" Homer for the benefit of his pupils. Alcibiades gave that schoolmaster a box on the ear. It is the only sensible way to deal with many editors.

There is no occasion, then, to dread that word "artist," or that word "literature," or to imagine that because they are peculiarly appropriate in any consideration of the work of William Dean Howells they involve something or other above the heads of people or heavy or dull. Especially must we be on our guard lest any prejudice against that word "American" incline us to doubt the possibility of greatness in one of our own writers who belongs to our own day. It is easy enough for us to accept the greatness of Poe because he comes to us fortified and supported by the critics of Europe. Had Poe never been discovered by the French he would now, I am persuaded, be quite forgotten by all but the discriminating few over here. How differently they manage these things in France. If a great literary artist

makes his appearance there, he need not wait to be discovered by the English.

It will be observed that William Dean Howells has been widely read in his own country, that his name is a household word wherever books are appreciated. Nevertheless, his rank as a literary artist is not discovered among us. The average American, even if he were highly cultivated, would be somewhat surprised if told that William Dean Howells is as great a literary artist as Balzac, greater from that point of view than Thackeray or George Eliot or Tolstoy, or Kipling.[1] He is far more interesting, or, as the critics say, compelling than all of them. Howells has, necessarily, his atmosphere. The atmosphere of Howells is characteristically American. The atmosphere of Balzac is characteristically French. There are in Balzac pages and pages devoted to the

[1] These things are matters of taste, to be sure, but Rudyard Kipling writes very badly for such a "great" author, doesn't he? It is the only tendency he seems to me to share—now and then—with Shakespeare.

establishment of this atmosphere. Hence he is unreadable when his art is not at its summit. In Howells this atmosphere is created with more subtlety, with more art. Howells never has those unreadable pages—unreadable to an alien mind, that is to say. In the matter of control over his art, in the detail of touch, feeling, intimacy, Howells is finer than Balzac although Balzac has terrific characters, terrible vices, terrifying climaxes, and Howells does not deal in such things. This is but a way of saying that Balzac is faithful to the Gallic temperament, the French environment, his *milieu*, and that Howells reflects what Henry James calls the American scene.

Balzac has again, as all European literary artists have, the enormous advantage of an adequate criticism. There is no prejudice in France against French literature just because it happens to be French. The critic in the country of Balzac is not afraid to proclaim the greatness of his country's literature. There is no "mother country" to daunt him. Howells

Our Fear

labors under the disadvantage of the national attitude to American literature. Nobody dares to say how great a literary artist he is.[1] We are afraid the English will laugh at us. Moreover, it is not now our national habit. We do not make the eagle scream any more. Mr. Jefferson Brick has left the field of criticism to Mr. William Crary Brownell.[2] There is no way of finding out who is great in literature with us, even from the standpoint of contemporaries. The patronizing school of criticism is too powerful. There is something positively artless in the sophistication of our everyday, ordinary book reviewers, to say nothing of our critics. They have all read everything. They are very much like our dramatic critics, who are perpetually telling us that the suspicious old uncle striving to conceal a peccadillo of his youth is a "stock figure" on the

[1] Except, of course, myself. I, however, do not count. The English never heard of me.

[2] I think the difference between these two is the same as looking first through one end of the telescope and then through the other.

stage. What of it? If any playwright can take a hackneyed theme and thrill me with it, well and good. He is greater than the dramatist who must get hold of a new idea, "something original."

III

THE HOWELLS AMERICAN

A MIRACLE of the literary art of Howells is achieved time and again in this use of what to an inexperienced critic might seem the hackneyed. Howells never consents to go beyond the facts of human experience for his material. His art rests upon life as we Americans live it. He has no adventitious aids in the form of artificial plots, gods out of machines, climaxes. The scene is commonplace. The conversation is that which we all overhear. The types are familiar. The effect is invariably beautiful. It seems incredible that things like this can happen all around us without our special wonder. It is amazing to find that we Americans can be so interesting in our dullness, our insipidity, our lack of the picturesque in character, our temperamental destitution. More unex-

pected than anything else is the discovery that American humor is in its essence so subtle, so refined, so complex and yet so patent. There is an impression that American humor is a form of horseplay when it is not wild exaggeration. Howells has disproved that fallacy.

Turning, now, from Howells the literary artist to another aspect of his work altogether, it seems to me that he has understood his countrymen, the essential native American, with a comprehensiveness unexampled in fiction. Dickens understood the English in many respects, but he did not understand his countrymen through and through as Howells understands Americans through and through. For instance, Dickens is not apparently happy in delineating all ranks and types of Englishmen. Howells goes from the bottom of American society to the top with equal ease although not, I admit, with equal sympathy. Here again he suggests Balzac. The cultivated American gentleman, the finished American lady, the country bumpkin, the factory

hand, the lawyer, the business man, the writer, the young girl of good position in society, the maiden from the rural districts who must go to work in a factory—Howells knows them all. They appear before us with all the distinctness of fine portraiture. Their talk is reported with stenographic accuracy. They could step right out of his pages into a Maine village or into Boston without betraying themselves because they all ring true. Amazing as are their adventures, they reflect the life of our country. Faithfully, on the other hand, as they reflect the life of our country, they are part and parcel of a great story. We see right into their hearts, their lives. There is an absurd idea among a class of critics who receive much deference on this subject of seeing through the outer skin of a character into the motives within. We are told that this is an impossibility. The novelist ought never to know what is going on in the minds of his characters. This would be a valid objection to the art of Howells if that art were not so perfect.

William Dean Howells

Howells never gets "inside" his characters unconvincingly. He follows the reflections of his characters as they live their lives only within the limits of actual human experience. There are people whom we understand so completely that we can see what is going on in their minds as they talk and act before us. The mother can read her daughter's face sometimes. She can not do so always. Howells understands this complexity of human nature and he never exceeds the limits of its interpretation.

We are established, consequently, upon a footing of rare intimacy with his men, his women, his youths and his maidens. The intimacy of Howells, nevertheless, is not at all like the intimacy of Thackeray. It has nothing in common with the intimacy of Trollope, who addresses himself to his readers to explain how good the "show" is going to be. Howells is too fine an artist to undertake his effects in that fashion. Neither does he assume any familiarity with a reader by an affectation of that pertness which seduces the

writers of department store advertisements occasionally and makes the announcement of tailors of "ready made" trousers a display of impertinence to possible customers. Howells is a master of the distinguished in manner. He is reserved. Nevertheless he has an effect of intimacy which is as delightful as the discovery that some casual acquaintance, unbosoming himself to us in the course of a railway journey, is in reality the President of the United States. It is an intellectual treat in itself to realize that a writer so easy to follow, so simple in his effects, so true to our own knowledge of life and of human nature and so absorbing in the interest he creates is at the same time one of the supreme literary artists. Such is the effect of the intimacy of Howells. He has the distinction of style denied to the too prevalent kind of contemporary writer who assumes an offensive familiarity of tone with his reader.

Here, if anywhere, familiarity breeds contempt. The tone of contemporary style in

narrative is so familiar that a well bred reader might take offense at it.

The most important single element in style is strength and this effect of strength is missed if the manner be too intimate. For this reason the average short story in the average periodical is a curiosity. One would imagine that the love of a woman were trivial and inconsequential, the style in which the theme is usually handled being so vapid.

Strength of style should be accompanied by beauty. Many writers confuse beauty of style with mere prettiness of style. Prettiness of style leads to the pitfall of intimacy.

The heresy of intimacy in style arises from a fallacy to which the college graduate is prone. He thinks the masses of mankind like intimacy. The inexperienced politician slaps the humble voter on the back with the cry: "Hello, Mike!" The able and experienced politician approaches the humble voter with perfect deference and suggests gravely: "I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. O'Flaherty?" Of

course, one must do this sort of thing with a certain sincerity to give it a proper effect.

The cure, then, of the present defect of intimacy in style is a more dignified introduction. No writer, in an introduction, should slap a reader on the back and hail him by his first name and this is vulgarity into which the intimacy of Howells never degenerates.

All this, however, is by way of thunder in the index, my own introduction to the subject.

IV

THE TECHNIQUE OF HOWELLS

No literary artist has ever used the English tongue with such beauty of manner in the novel as William Dean Howells attains in his characteristic chapters. Where fiction is concerned, he remains one of the few lords of language.

This detail calls for more elucidation than might otherwise be necessary owing to the saturation of the American mind with the atmosphere of British criticism. The Britons possess such slight aptitude for the perception of literary values that they have still to discover the decay of the English language in England.

Let us glance at the equipment of a novelist as something to be distinguished from the equipment of, say, a historian. I am speaking now of technique. The novelist and the historian are alike in that both must have style.

Good Style and Bad

There are German historians, I am told, who disdain anything in the nature of a style. They write without one. A historian who uses the English language cannot dispense with style, and here, to repeat, he is in the dilemma of the novelist, the fact that there are novelists of execrable style merely proving the point. A historian, however, is no better off for being a master of dialogue, whereas in a novelist some capacity to manage dialogue is absolutely necessary. Inferior artistry in the novel is sure to manifest itself first of all in the treatment of dialogue.

Plot, it may be supposed, is of no importance to a historian—at any rate it is of no such critical importance to him as it is to the novelist. That theory is not altogether sound. For example, the tremendous height in the conquest of Mexico is scaled by him who follows the story when Cortez comes back, and all before this episode is but a preparation of the reader of Prescott for that final crash of the Aztec world. This is finely observed by Harry

William Dean Howells

Thurston Peck in a little study of Prescott that all Americans should read and that all of them ignore. In Gibbon, again, the long Roman history is synthesized around an idea of a decline and fall. A historian who neglects a general idea as the thread with which to bind his episodes together will grow dusty on a back shelf. The corresponding thing in a novelist is plot.

The historian and the novelist both must be able to delineate character.

I am of the opinion, finally, that the novelist and the historian are most alike in their vital need of an art of narration. The tale may be ever so good, but if neither the novelist nor the historian have the ability to tell it, there might as well be no tale at all. The English, whose criticism of literature is a display of lack of insight when it is not borrowed from others, cherish a delusion on this subject of plot. They say that before a novelist can tell a story he must have a story to tell. That proposition was put before us by Anthony Trollope. It

was received by ourselves with all the deference we have for the imbecilities of the Britons on the subject of literature, although it is a well known fact that Sir Walter Scott would begin a novel with no idea at all of how he was going to continue it, to say nothing of ending it. No matter how good a plot may be, a novelist will spoil it if he lack a mastery of the narrative art. He may conceal the deficiency behind a blaze of brilliant dialogue. He may atone for it through the subtlety of his delineation of character. He can force us to blink his deficiency by a display of gifts that have nothing to do with the technique of his craft—the sense of humor, for example. The fact remains that a mastery of the art of narration is essential to greatness in a novelist.

This mastery of the narrative art is the conspicuous characteristic of the novels of William Dean Howells. His dialogue, his analysis of mood and of temperament, his use of episode, his observations on the subject of woman—everything in a novel of his will be found in

strict subordination to narrative. He makes it his business to follow the progress of events, and we go with him, or rather we are carried along. His method is a happy illustration of the imbecility of those critics who tell us there are no "plots" in real life, no isolated episodes, that is to say, nothing rounded out and complete in itself, after the fashion of a novelist's constructed tale. The truth is that life affords these things abundantly. They stun us with their "art," their resemblance to a Greek play, an Italian comedy, a gay French novel. Everything is to be found in life as we live it, including the complicated and mechanical plots of dear Wilkie Collins.[1] All this is known to

[1] By the way, I can not pass the name of Wilkie Collins without protesting against current English disparagement of his genius. I agree with every word of Swinburne's praise of him. The statement that Wilkie Collins could not delineate character is preposterous. His Lydia Gwilt in "Armadale" is the most subtle revelation of a certain type of woman in all fiction. His Horatio Wragge in "No Name" is a masterpiece of humorous character sketching. I do not regard "The Woman in White," wonderful as it is, as the greatest of the novels of Wilkie Collins. That place is held by "Armadale," one of the supremely strong things in literature.

Climax

Howells, but he exploits the fact with the true artist's restraint. No novelist of his rank neglects the melodramatic more serenely. No novelist invests every day life with such excitement. The excitement may be subdued but it is genuine. The cunning of the art of Howells in narration achieves always the effect of a series of events rising, rising, rising, to a consummation, towards a catastrophe, up a Calvary.

V

A STUDY IN SUBTLETY

THE achievement of an effect like this out of such material as is afforded by the domestic affairs of native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin is proof of the supremacy of Howells in narrative. There is a soul of circumstance in life from day to day, an indefinable and intangible something in even a long monotony that kills, and this soul, this something never pervades a Howells situation. This most subtle seizure of the spirit of a human affair and its exposure in a fiction may be likened to the work of one of those masters of line drawing—"alas! too few"—who reveal an unexpected and undetected charm in an old and familiar street. A miracle of that sort is worked because the artist had a vision in the first place, but he could

not pass his vision on to us without adequacy of technique. The adequacy of the Howells technique is shown by the unpromising and difficult nature of the raw material. It is impossible to rise from the perusal of a Howells novel like "April Hopes" without a feeling of blank amazement at the tragical, comical, operatical, fantastical qualities of humdrum and conventional American existence presented in narrative form with unsparing realism. The soul of it all he will not seize.

The real magic of the narrative art of Howells is apparent when an effort is made to recall a story he has told. It is not easy to explain the breathlessness of the interest with which the suspense has been attended. No eccentricity of character arrested us, for Howells knows neither fiends in human shape nor angels on the earth. There are no mysteries of the detective school on the one hand, of the Radcliffe sort on the other. The business of the apparitions in "The Undiscovered Country" is disposed of in the least sensational manner imaginable. The

author insists upon a dry, cool, matter of fact, well bred, detached remoteness from the ghosts. His realism is without partisanship. With what a poetry of effect the whole episode is brought off! Egeria, those apparitions, her preposterous Papa—the darling, ridiculous, inefficient man!—their flight in the snow, the journalistic literary man Ford, the Shakers in their community, swim in an ocean of poetry, in spite of all! That is because "The Undiscovered Country" is a love story.

The love story, the tale of love, that is the specialty of Howells. His narrative art has all love for its province, the love of which the poets are full, that wonderful, authentic love which has come down to us untarnished and unstained from the days of Hero and Leander. This is what Howells is all about—Cupid and Psyche. The impression is all the more vivid because his attitude is essentially scientific. He deals with the American woman after the fashion or, to be strictly accurate, in the spirit of Henri Fabre reporting the progress of

events among the spiders and the beetles and the butterflies of France. The effect of a highly scientific accuracy conveyed by Howells in "reporting" his heroines is the great miracle of his narrative manner.

It is a manner which has all the elements well in hand, with an eye to the fine effect of the whole. Love is that effect. The atmosphere of love saturates the waves even in that most unusual of all tales of the sea, "The Lady of the Aroostook." A coarse man might miss the subtlety, the delicacy, the gossamer weave of that divine thing, but no artist, and, above all, no woman with any heart and any intuition could miss the sweetness, the ravishing sweetness, of it all. There are a hundred subtleties in that story, and how simple it remains. The very storm is attuned to the love arising in a man's heart for Lydia—yet it is so real a ship, that Aroostook, and no mere painted ship upon a painted ocean. Howells is so perfect a master of the narrative side of his art that he can yield to no temptation to play Captain Mar-

ryat. It is a love story with the sea subordinate to love.

The peculiar genius of Howells as studied from this point of view displays itself with most consummate power and with most consummate art in dialogue. Mark Twain—I think it was he—drew attention years ago to the purely technical side of the skill with which Howells phrases the accompaniments of conversation and transacts the rhetorical business of it. There is no following of precedent in the use of expressions like "she said," or "he rejoined." Not that Howells so tortures our language, in the fashion of his imitators, as to allow himself the expression that "she agonized," when the idea to be conveyed is simply that she uttered her words in a tone appropriate to the sensation of agony. Howells has been imitated to the point of caricature by literary ladies where this detail is concerned, and particularly by writers of the short story. He is the inventor of a prose technique in this detail alone which is no less remarkable than the departure of the Brit-

ish poets from the couplet of Pope. It is interesting, by the way, that no striking advance in the art of writing fiction on the side of its technique has taken place since the arrival of Howells. In England the writing of English, viewed as an art, has distinctly declined, precisely as in Canada and in Australia the art of writing English has distinctly advanced. In no land, however, that enjoys the English language has an artist in the technique of fiction worthy of comparison with Howells made his appearance since the writing of "The Rise of Silas Lapham."

Dialogue in Howells serves to carry on the business of narration, to develop the plot. Plot with him depends sometimes upon the friction of circumstance aggravated by the effect of one type of character upon another. Catastrophe looms. Love is always with us. In his transmutation of these baser elements into the pure gold of his characteristic dialogue, the creator of Silas Lapham, of Marcia Hubbard, of Lydia Blood, of Doctor Boynton, of

William Dean Howells

Annie Kilburn lets us into many secrets of talk. There is nothing quite so wonderful as the conversations proceeding in the chapters of Howells, nothing quite so complex, nothing quite so dangerous in its implications. Yet nothing could be simpler, either, or better bred or in stricter accord with the social obligations imposed upon ladies and gentlemen. If there be procurable outside of the novels of Howells any such course of instruction in the art of conversation as may be had within them, I have missed it.

The miracle of all this is in the simple working of it. We are never fatigued by the intellectuality of any heroine, or bored by a professor. Doctor Boynton's elucidations of the materialized essences result merely in disclosing himself. Nor is the dramatic quality of a situation sacrificed for the sake of elucidating character in this fashion. Neither will Howells lower his art to the level of mere caricature. The exquisite girl who in "Indian Summer" persists in loving that middle aged gentleman

so madly is amusing but the sacred quality of the flame upon the altar of her temperament rescues her from ridicule. No doubt the something or other that is spiritualized and unique in the American soul is reflected here, but to the art of Howells and to that alone must credit be given for the flavor of this thing in our literature. He brought the American conception of love into literature. He made it real and convincing with his dialogue, saturated with love, poetical on account of love, and yet paradoxically sensible and real. Who suspected, before Howells wrote, say, "April Hopes," that the ordinary talk of American lovers resembled that of the angels? And what is there in all the dialogue of Jane Austen to compare in the refinement and perfection of its humor, with the episode of the coffee pot in that same "April Hopes"?

And as all dialogue in Howells is the instrument of his art in narration, his powers of description subserve the purpose of getting his story told. In no masterpiece of his—I am

speaking of the great novels—are we detained by gratuitous rapture over scenery. When the atmosphere of the tale, the heart of its mystery, must be plucked out of the New England air, we are made to breathe it—but always in terms of a personal and human interest. There is not in the whole range of English fiction, for example, an introduction to a novel comparable in beauty with the opening chapter of "A Modern Instance." Its effect is due, not to the perfection of the prose in which the river and the plain are brought under our eyes, perfect as that prose is, but to the suggestion of the human presence, the premonition of the tale that is to come. There is a heroine haunting these woods. The boughs of the tree are dripping with her love! This is the mood of the scenery in Howells. The snow is white with love. Howells is a romanticist always, his method alone being realistic. We see this most clearly in "The Undiscovered Country," where the disappearing snow and the truant spring and the reeling summer and the shame-

less autumn are all drunk with love. But they keep their distance, they know their place, which is that of chorus, of cup bearer, in some instances of invited guest. In this aspect of the art of Howells, "The Undiscovered Country" is the most poetical of all novels.[1]

The structure of a Howells novel, then, affords a striking impression of unity. He makes one think of those stage managers by whom no detail is neglected. The instrumentality upon which Howells relies conspicuously is, indeed, his style. It is a style so soft, so smooth, so rich, so warm, that it makes one think of velvet. The resources of the English language are for the first time fully uncovered for the purposes of fiction by this discreet and aristocratic style. But that style alone must have left Howells a stylist and only that. His equipment in the technical elements of his voca-

[1] This is not at all the view which Howells takes of himself. He has striven in his book on "Criticism and Fiction" to prove himself a realist. However no artist is competent to interpret himself, to say what he stands for. He can not be his own interpreter.

tion goes beyond the detail of style. It extends to the difficulty of dialogue, the subtlety of descriptive effect, the task of differentiating character from character, the business of getting on with the story, whatever that story may be. The supreme gift of all in the novelist is constructive and here Howells reveals the measure of his greatness. He synthesizes with the science of the chemist. He holds his creation together by maintaining that perfect balance of all factors which is the secret of the equilibrium of the universe, as well as of the success of "The Rise of Silas Lapham." This is why the technique of William Dean Howells surpasses that of any other novelist.

VI

THE PURITY OF THE WOMEN OF HOWELLS

In what school of human experience William Dean Howells acquired his knowledge of the heart and soul of woman is not obvious. No doubt, he had from the very beginning a special faculty for this kind of study. Moreover, it is the business of the novelist to know women well. A novelist may be great and yet know surprisingly little about women. A novelist, in fact, may be a woman and portray her sex inadequately. A lady novelist rarely affords us a comprehensive view of any feminine character.

An arresting feature of the work of William Dean Howells is the fact that a writer who knows women so well should find them so good. It is even more remarkable that a novelist who

finds women so good can make them so interesting. A "great" novelist—and we Americans derive our idea of "greatness" in a novelist meekly from England—excels usually in portrayal of vile women. Vile women are often amazingly interesting. Good women are even more interesting, more powerful, more complex.

A young woman who enters upon the literary career is sometimes confronted with a plausible fallacy on the subject of "life." The thing called "life" involves standards of conduct. Of these there are two—the man's and the woman's. The man's standard of conduct, a woman is told, gives him that experience of "life" which his works reflect. If Shakespeare and Goethe, Heine and de Musset, had conformed to the standards of morality prescribed for woman their works could not have been written. If her purpose be serious, then, a woman who has taken to "literature" must exchange her morality for that of the Byrons and the Baudelaires.

Living Life

I have heard this kind of argument, now and then, on the lips of women who hoped to be singers. Live life! I believe that is the formula. I have no means of knowing the extent to which this view prevails to-day among our literary women. It comes to the surface occasionally in the discussions of the hour. The fallacy upon which it rests arises from a misconception of the real nature of greatness in literature.

Greatness in literature is the result either of the artistry of a genius or of his spiritual insight. A poet is found now and then who to consummate artistry adds the keenest spiritual insight. Dante is an illustration. Milton affords us another. The difference between the genius of artistry and the genius of spiritual insight is best revealed by a comparison of Poe with Wordsworth. Poe is a much greater artist than Wordsworth but Wordsworth is a much greater poet than Poe. The astonishing thing in Poe is the fact that an artist of his blazing genius should be so destitute of spiritual in-

sight. He seems never to have seen that water turned into wine. He knew of eternal streams, and he believed in ethereal dances. Beauty is the echo of the songs of the angels or the combinations of color effected by the flutter of their wings. Beauty is music. But Poe has no suspicion of a region above and beyond beauty—of the thing we shall behold when the curtain that we call life is lifted for the great performance of the masterpiece of God. We see at once that Poe has not only never been behind the scenes, but has his doubts on the subject of the "show" that is to come. With how rare an artistry he puts those doubts! He is filled with despair himself, and this despair of the "show" would disperse the audience before ever the curtain lifted if we did not realize in some subtle fashion that Poe lacks spiritual insight. We admire the despair of Poe because it is beautiful. To object to Poe because he has no "message" is to write oneself down a Philistine in the approved Anglo-Saxon manner. Poe's despair is his message.

Wordsworth

Turning now to Wordsworth, we observe with surprise that a spiritual vision so rare should attend an artistry so inadequate. Even in his rare, most splendid moments, Wordsworth cannot approach Poe as an artist. But Wordsworth rises with such ease to heights that Poe cannot attain! The glories of what he sees reflect themselves in the long stream of Wordsworth's verse. It is a dull stream but now and then it flows "fast by the oracle of God." We reach a new realm of the spirit altogether. The stream itself may seem interminable, its waters leaden, but we have those wonderful sunrises. The Wordsworthian stream seizes the fires in the sky. The scoriac river of Poe is subterranean. Wordsworth has moments of sublimity in which he conveys an effect of artistry. Consider "The Daffodils" and that ode. But there are in both such lapses from form that we feel Wordsworth to be second rate as an artist, although he is a poet of the highest genius—the genius which takes the form of spiritual insight. This accounts

for the vast bulk of Wordsworth's poetry. He had to practice, practice and practice, like a little girl at a piano, and when he no longer practiced, he ceased to be a poet.

If this difference between the genius of Poe and the genius of Wordsworth be fully realized, it will be easy to expose the fallacy to which an occasional woman in literature has given so ready an ear. Genius in a woman, when she has any, is the genius of spiritual insight. We are often told that genius is of no sex. This is a mistake, as Mrs. Jameson pointed out. The genius of a woman can manifest itself most happily through her spiritual growth. As a poet, she can be great in Wordsworth's manner, but not in Poe's manner. The tremendous spiritual visions have been those of women so often. This spiritual insight is the substance of the genius of the Sybil, of Joan of Arc, of Catherine of Siena, of Elizabeth of Hungary, of Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, of ever so many more who lived their poems instead of writing them. A Poe or a

Wilde would have lived his poetry, did live his poetry, in quite another way.

A woman in literature thus destroys the foundation of her career when she undertakes to "live life" in a man's sense of the term. Wordsworth could not have written that ode if he were living life as literary women are sometimes told to live life. What a thousand pities this question has been left to the Philistines as a matter of morals! Our women of genius do not hear the subject discussed in anything but the British manner. Those British know nothing of this subject because their women have no genius. Genius is found among our women because their origin is not so exclusively Anglo-Saxon. But the genius of American women is thwarted by the deference they are trained to pay to British opinion. Howells shows no such deference. If a defiance of the Philistine morality echoes from London our women receive it with no suspicion of British incapacity to discuss the subject from the standpoint of either woman or "her sphere."

William Dean Howells

No anomaly could be greater than that of an American woman of genius undertaking to "live life" at the bidding of any Briton whose pieces read well between the covers of a book. Now, all that our "literary" women hear on the subject of living life for the sake of their careers is, as far as they are concerned, of British origin. No educated American girl is ever permitted to suspect unless she reads Howells how amazingly poor the literature of the English really is. As a guide to the living of "life," it is now preposterous. If this truth be less obvious than it should, the fault is that of the "great" novelists of the approved British pattern.

One of the glories of Howells is his revelation of what we may call, for the purposes of this analysis, the Wordsworthian woman as distinguished from the Byronian woman, from the Shelley woman. The American woman must be true, that is, to the New England conscience in its organic development upon a spiritual plane. Unless she do so, she can not be a lady

in any sense of the term known to us. Howells proves this up to the hilt., Of, course, to tell us the tale of the native American lady in the setting supplied by the literary age of Howells in fidelity to the principles of his art was a delicate as well as a difficult task. The Howells lady has to be a virtuous woman, as the Victorians said, or she could not have appeared as a heroine at all. She illustrates or, rather, demonstrates the codes and etiquettes and ideas of her time and class with an amazing lifelikeness. Instead of speaking of the heroine of a Howells novel, one ought to add the "s" and speak of the heroines. A Howells novel is full of them. How beautifully they are managed!

The method of Howells is not like that of those masters of line drawing who convey a whole character in a stroke. It seems to have something of the touch of the French master who would not paint the crucifixion, throwing an immense shadow of it into the foreground instead.

The merit of this method, the vivid effect of it, would be unattainable to any but a literary artist of the highest genius. Think of the difficulties it involves! I refer, of course, to the difficulties for an American novelist of the period in which Howells was doing his great creative work. He found his feminine characters to be all, in the main, native here. The age with him was that which followed our civil war, again speaking generally and allowing a generous limit to the period. "A Fearful Responsibility" is an adventure of some Americans in Italy while our civil war raged. The detail to note is that the women of Howells fit very snugly into their setting. They are all so intimately associated with their environment that they make me think of the chorus in a Greek play or in a comic opera of the Victorian age.

The striking thing about a Howells woman is that she is so unlike any other Howells woman. All those women are of one stock, of one mind in essentials, yet each is in her in-

dividual capacity so different from the rest. There are no caricatures in the offensive implications of the term, for no Howells heroine is anything but a lady, though she stepped only yesterday out of a home in rural Maine to the humblest "rooming house" in Boston.

How strongly sexed, none the less, those Howells ladies are created, how passionate! They set forth in a relentless pursuit of the right man with such intuition! The whole, passionate soul is naked before us.

This intensity of nature in the American woman, her boundless capacity not only for love but for bringing home its object bound and captive is not perhaps an original discovery of Howells's own. He exploits the discovery with an art and an ease that render it all his. The refinement of his method is absolute. The beauty of his manner is flawless. In his heroine may burn the flame that consumed the most abandoned of the Byzantine empresses. Her swift and sidelong glance may have the subtle significance of the look

in Cleopatra's eyes when first she fastened them upon Antony. Never, for all that, does a true Howells heroine forget herself. Never does she abandon herself. She is a Christian lady. She realizes the part with a spirituality so instinctive that her boldest gesture cannot be misunderstood even when she is in the very act of revealing the flames by which she is consumed. It is as if Dido were reincarnate to our eyes in the capacity of Quakeress. The analogy from Dido is a little misleading because Æneas got away from Dido and he could not have escaped a Howells heroine. Lily Mayhew is a great exception. Miss Kenton threw one lover over.

Have I said already that an illuminating treatise on the mystery of woman could be compiled in the form of pertinent extracts from the novels of Howells? If so, let me repeat myself, since Whitman did the same. What Howells thinks of women is deducible from the observations he scatters through his greatest tales which are of adventure among women.

Heroines

Obviously, he admires women prodigiously and he respects them as much as he admires them. The art with which he communicates this feeling to his readers is all his own and is inimitable.

The nature of the literary gift that can achieve such an effect is very precious. The genius that creates a Becky Sharp in Thackeray's fashion, or the genius that creates a Valerie Marneffe in Balzac's manner is less exalted, less subtle, less rare even, than the gifts required for the adequate treatment of the Howells heroine. Heine has tried somewhere to explain why it is so much easier to paint a crowded battle picture on a gigantic canvas than to do an old woman's visage in Rembrandt's manner within a little frame.

If this illustration were not misleading in some respects as well as very informing in others, it would be easy to sum up the Howells portraits of women by saying that they are done in the Rembrandt manner. It would be a misunderstanding of the genius of Howells

altogether to suggest that Howells does not allow a woman to stand out as some English and French novelists have their Becky Sharps and their Valerie Marneffes "stand out." That would have been a method alien to the realism of the essentially American novelist, false to his conception of his art.

VII

A GLANCE AT MARCIA

THIS is a point that may be brought out more clearly by reference to a novelist who has the luck to share one trait with Howells conspicuously. Anthony Trollope reveals an amazing insight into the love and the motive of woman. In this detail he has no equal in the whole catalogue of British male novelists until we go as far back as Richardson. Trollope has an amazing comprehension of the young lady. Meredith cannot approach the ground held by Trollope here. The marvel is all the greater because Englishmen as a rule do not understand women at all, the limitations of Dickens in this respect being ludicrous. Intimate, however, as is the acquaintance of Trollope with the heart of woman, he is no artist. Now,

William Dean Howells

Howells is an artist to the finger tips and a very great artist indeed, although our American subservience to the British literary superstition will long cast its shadow athwart the light of this really obvious truth.

To say of Howells that he has created no "great" feminine character is, moreover, to forget that the American lady in the Howells setting no more condescended to be a "great" character than a member of the British House of Commons in our twentieth century would condescend to be a "great" orator. It is the business in life of a Howells woman to fit as perfectly into her social environment as if she were a gem in a setting. It is her business in life to be buffeted by fate, to have self-effacement, to be very, very feminine, to be revered. The women of Howells are all of these, but the miracle of their creator's art is in the circumstance that they are so vivid, so real, so destitute of the insipidity one looks for.

The paradox of woman, as we encounter her in that native American, Anglo-Saxon atmos-

phere, is her "reality," in the metaphysical sense. The women of Howells, in all his novels, either make the great decisions, or see that they are made. Woman has no master but she appears, for all that, in a condition of subservience. The subservience is ever to a thing mysterious, indefinable. It may be convention. Perhaps it is that New England conscience. Or is it a survival of the Nemesis of the ancient Greeks? It broods over the women of the Howells world.

Howells has decided finally the controversy as to whether [redacted]t women have a sense of humor. His management of their dialogue is infinitely finer than the finest thing of the kind in Meredith. Howells has exploited the sense of humor in women with a subtlety suggesting it as too feminine a thing in its spirit or essence to yield itself and its possibilities entirely to the heavy touch of coarse man.

The heroines of Howells have moments, inspired and perfect moments, when they might sustain without shrinking a comparison with

the heroines of Shakespeare himself! The dialogue is a sufficient proof of it.

My own favorite among the heroines of Howells charms me for another reason altogether. She does, indeed, take the initiative in her love affair with a passionate boldness unparalled since Juliet had that unfortunate affair with Romeo, but Marcia—for I am thinking of the heroine of "A Modern Instance"—is New England in every fiber. She is fitted into her setting with the cunning a Florentine goldsmith of old might have shown in working a gem into a ring. She makes a fool of herself over the man she loves and she does it divinely. With what infatuation, and at the same time with what good taste, what chastity of attitude Howells permits himself to gloat over the physical aspect of his Marcia!

Never shall I forget the thrill with which I stumbled upon Marcia in that inspired first chapter of "A Modern Instance." And I have a seraglio that includes such captives as Clarissa Harlowe, too! I have intruded with

Rastignac upon the privacy of Madame de Nucingen. I have gone stealthily with Montoni along the fatal corridor of the castle of Udolpho, halting with all his guilt upon my soul outside the door between the slumbering Emily and me. I have fallen with d'Artagnan upon the bosom of Milady. When I met Marcia I forgot the sirens and the serpents of old Nile to linger in the glow of that lamp she carried to the front door to let Bartley Hubbard in. She lifted it high, that lamp. "The action brought her figure in relief," explains her creator. He dwells upon her form and figure lovingly, but he reveals the woman beyond and within the temple of her spirit, a Wordsworthian woman. The splendor of the genius of our Howells resides in that capacity of his to reveal what a truly extraordinary thing is an ordinary woman.

The great novelists have for the most part been well content to delineate the extraordinary woman, the paragon of virtue, the fiend from below, the woman who is fallen, the ec-

centric. That is relatively easy. To find in the every day woman the attributes of a Marcia is possible to that writer only who has looked into her heart with something of Shakespeare's vision. This Howells can do because his sympathy with the woman in love is as subtle as his comprehension of her. The madness of Marcia's pursuit of Bartley Hubbard is so very natural! Her jealousy is as insane as it is charming. The most wonderful thing about Marcia is the fact that there is nothing at all remarkable about her. She is glorious because love has made her so, and not because of any qualities of her own. When it is said of Howells that he understands women the truth conveyed is that he appreciates the intensity, the power, the daring of her heart. He is one novelist out of ten thousand of his sex, for rare is he who has been afforded a glimpse into the mysteries unveiled by Howells. Not that the glimpse would do the average novelist any good, seeing that the average novelist is without the touch of Howells and would not know

a Marcia if he saw one. A great woman is seldom recognized except by the few.

Marcia affords the spectacle of a woman in love with a man but half in love. Her rush to the railway station, where she overtakes him and marries him before he can recover from his surprise, could have been contrived with delicacy only by a consummate artist. True, Bartley was in a way kidnapped—but he was kidnapped not by any Becky Sharp, nor by a Valerie Marneffe, but by Marcia—beautiful, jealous, good Marcia, the perfect lady, the sweet, dark, lady, with red, very red lips!

Throughout the agonizing disillusion that comes to Marcia in her wedded years, the art of Howells is tested most severely, and it does not fail him once. I revel in this exquisite heroine's hot bickering with her husband. Howells brings him home drunk once in a manner beyond all the praise bestowed upon the British novelist who makes a specialty of this sort of scene.

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That poor Bartley Hubbard taunts Marcia at last with the fact that she kidnapped him. She had thrown him away in one of her fits of mad jealousy and then, finding that she could not live without him, she ran after him. The whole story of Marcia is in that bitter charge, flung in her face by her husband in the course of that last scene. Her passion is realized for us divinely here and still she retains that very womanly charm which makes a Howells heroine irresistible.

Of all the women of Howells I love Marcia best. I must commit myself still further by confessing that her image will haunt me as I sit with Mr. Slope on a sofa beside that shameless yet beautiful woman in Trollope's best novel. Nor can I sink into the arms of the most tempting Marquise in all Balzac without a consciousness of sullying the soul I had held in consecration to Marcia.

My attitude to Marcia, the irresistible Marcia, thus, is precisely that of Ernest Dowson to Cynara in the great lines:

A Tribute

I have forgot much, Cynara, gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing to put thy pale lost lilies out of mind,

but I can't do it. I think of Marcia while reading of Madame Bovary:

But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion!

VIII

THE HUB OF THE UNIVERSE OF HOWELLS

TAKEN as a whole, the fiction of William Dean Howells comprises the most effective indictment of the native world, of the native American society, that has ever been framed. It is a world of the trivial and of the inconsequential, a society of men and women without ideas except those caught on the rebound or at second hand from the Europeans, a world of infinite physical comfort, a world that is childish and feminized.

At no time in his life, I am certain, did it enter the head of Howells to indict that Anglo-Saxon element in American life to which he owes his being and upon which he has drawn for his material. Indeed, the native American, in the pages of Howells, is a likable character, freed in some fashion or other from the dis-

agreeable characteristics of the English. The American in Howells belongs to the breed of the Englishman in Trollope, but we are conscious of a difference. The Englishman in Trollope is thoroughly masculine. The American in Howells is feminized. No careful student of Howells can miss the fact that a native American of Anglo-Saxon origin gains no footing as a gentleman in the society of his own country if he be not womanish, lacking in virility, the type of man who seems born for a woman to play with. This accounts to me for the significant fact that whenever in the Howells gallery of male portraits we encounter one upon whose features is the stamp of genius or virility, he is not introduced to us as a gentleman in the proper sense of the word. The typical gentleman of Howells wears male attire, of course, but he would be more comfortable, I think, in skirts. This suggests no flaw in the art of our great novelist. It vindicates his realism. George Eliot is untrue to life when her heroes turn out to be women but

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Howells is faithful to reality when his hero does the same. No doubt, there was some feminizing principle at work in the men who came over in the Mayflower, and we see its outcome in the Howells gentleman.

The temptation to illustrate this point by a study of "The Rise of Silas Lapham," is very great. I prefer to go to a novel that is less known. "Doctor Breen's Practice" remains, from the standpoint of the critic, the most significant of all the works of its author. In that study of native American life in New England, Howells exposes his method most nakedly, lets us into the secrets of his formula. The tale is shaken out of his sleeve as if it were a trick. It is. We have in this thing the very best pot boiler in the English language. There is no decline in that wonderful technique, no sign of weariness. It is a pot boiler because it is a repetition. We have met that nice young hero before. He gives himself away with his reverence for Woman. That philosophy of Woman, too, so wonderful, so convincing, so free from

anything like facetious disillusion and so quotable—we expect and would not dispense with it. This is not the tale, however, through which one's introduction to Howells should be made. There is too much artistry in it, too beautiful a manner. It is as light as foam, and still it has substance, for it brings home to us the truth that in the native American world the Anglo-Saxon of force and genius and virility does not "belong," is "impossible." The definition of efficiency in the biological sense as distinguished from the commercial sense is made by Woman. She has an ideal that works out in a feminized man. I suspect this to be due to an instinct for domination in herself. Woman in all the world of Howells is supreme. She may be the incarnation of whatever is trivial, like Mrs. Maynard, the patient of Doctor Breen, or she may be a wonderful young woman, like Doctor Breen herself. This beautiful homœopathic physician stands balanced before us a long time between her two lovers. Mr. Libby is the Howells young man,

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that native American of Anglo-Saxon origin and New England antecedents who springs from the aristocracy of manufacture and is so often on his way to Europe or returning thence. Nothing could be emptier than his head or more charming than his imbecility. Why he was going about so much with that married woman I cannot imagine, although it is true that she had left her husband.[1] An eager boyishness of manner is his, too, and he has his full share of reverence for Woman as disclosed by Howells, in which one respect he is like me. I am quite sure I am not so imbecile as Libby if only for the reason that I am no Howells young man. I wish I were. I would be charming then.

So Doctor Breen marries Libby. She refused to do that very thing, I know, and I felt certain she was going to marry Doctor Mulbridge. For once, I didn't know my Howells.

[1] Let me warn the reader against rushing to the library in hot haste for this novel in the expectation of coming across anything wicked. Not a wickedness in it from beginning to end! Howells would never deal in that sort of thing. The young man simply tags after the lady.

Gentlemen

In his pages the man of virile strength, the real man, I had nearly said, is socially out of the question. Usually an eccentric, he may be a foreman in the mill, or a journalist whose people are from the backwoods, or a man who made a fortune out of his meritorious paint or even a physician practicing in a lost corner of New England. In any event, the touch of genius damns him. I ought to have seen from the beginning that Doctor Breen never would marry Doctor Mulbridge. The mother of Doctor Mulbridge saw why. "I don't know," she told her son, "as she'd call you what they call a gentleman." And why was Doctor Mulbridge no gentleman in that world? Because he was a strong man. This is a fundamental fact in the world of Howells, a circumstance brought out not of set purpose but as an incident of his realism. What a collection of mediocrities the husbands of those women are! Man in that world exists as the husband of a woman he adores, or he is an absurdity.

I think this accounts for another remarkable characteristic of the world of Howells. I refer to its disability regarding ideas. This gingerbread world, with its young ladies of virtuous severity like Miss Blood and its conscientious spinsters like Annie Kilburn, is remarkably accessible to ideas. But the ideas must be emasculated, like the men the heroines marry. An idea in any other aspect has something about it that is either indelicate or dangerous. It is not adapted to the feminine mind. In the wonderful world into which we are peeping, everything must be adapted to that feminine mind because it is the only mind that arrives at the great decisions. What agonies of suspense attend the period of waiting for a young girl to do something, even in tales so unlike as "Indian Summer" and "The Lady of the Aroostook." The idea in those situations is intimate and personal, having particular reference to the virginities and the chastities, but it is an idea and therefore difficult, very difficult. Even when the idea is not intimate and personal but ab-

stract and ethical or sociological, as in "A Hazard of New Fortunes," or in "Annie Kilburn," it is a source of peril. It may get into a woman's head. A hero spends an incredible amount of time in the task of keeping an idea out of a woman's head. The heroine of "A Modern Instance" is the cause of much trouble on this account and in the end it is not certain that the idea actually gained access. It would have been an extraordinary thing. Lydia Blood is the only one of all the heroines who "gets" ideas, that is to say, more than one, but she is suspected of something that looks more or less like indelicacy. The interminable agony of "April Hopes" is due to the catastrophe that the heroine has an idea—not much of an idea outside the world we are considering, hardly recognizable as an idea so much as the suggestion of one.

Only less remarkable than the poverty of all these charming people intellectually, is their caste. Even when they emerge from the humblest of rural homes, they manifest all that

instinct for caste and that dread of equality which are the Anglo-Saxon's birthright. Such characteristics give him the stability of the Boston families that Howells loves. It is an attitude to life and even Silas Lapham takes it for granted. I suppose his daughters are not intended to be perfect ladies. At any rate they are not high caste, and the fact is brought home to us so delicately. The same point is made much of in Annie Kilburn's relations with that clergyman. There is a young man knocking about the world of Howells who once worked in overalls. The heroine allotted to him shuddered a great deal over that. The young women who work in a "store" are kept in their places. It is a native American world in which the "best people" patronize the efficient and in which ignorance of Europe is for the very vulgar only. A kind of pedantic exactness in the use of a European vocabulary makes one the heir of the ages indeed, and there is a paralyzing effect in one of the novels of a member of a high caste family addressing a fruit

peddler in the Italian language on the streets of Boston.

Ah, that Boston of Howells's! I am not at all interested in the Boston of those Adamses. I never saw the horrors of native Americanism in their Anglo-Saxon form set down unsparingly until I read the autobiography of the Charles Francis Adams who died in 1915. The agony he experienced in his efforts to adjust himself to the native American environment proves how great a man he was. His father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, had been illustrious before him in the largest native American manner—presidents, secretaries of this, that and the other, ministers abroad and all that.[1]

[1] Evidently one of those cousinships and clanships to which Howells refers in "The Rise of Silas Lapham" (page 243 of the edition published by Houghton Mifflin Company) as forming the admiration and terror of the adventurer in Boston society: "He finds himself hemmed in and left out at every turn by ramifications that forbid him all hope of safe personality in his comments on people; he is never less secure than when he hears some given Bostonian denouncing or ridiculing another. If he will be advised, he will guard himself from concurring in these criticisms, however just they appear, for

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The record is not so tremendous to those of us who, being imperfectly Americanized, are a menace to the dear republic, and to those precious institutions. I would not, for my single self, surrender the lines of Poe to Helen for the whole administration of the elder Adams. No Adams ever made an epigram, I believe, or uttered a witticism, or took a poetical view of the republic, or saw a truth in a flash of insight. The Charles Francis Adams of this autobiography was imperfectly Americanized. His tragedy was just that. When Americans disparage Boston, they disparage themselves. I consider Boston the greatest thing in the United States. It is true that Boston has petrified American thought in the

the probability is that their object is a cousin of not more than one remove from the censor. When the alien hears a group of Boston ladies calling one another, and speaking of all their gentlemen friends, by the familiar abbreviations of their Christian names, he must feel keenly the exile to which he was born; but he is then, at least, in comparatively little danger; while these latent and tacit cousinships open pitfalls at every step around him, in a society where Middlesexes have married Essexes and produced Suffolks for two hundred and fifty years."

forms and formulas of British thought. We have been made by Boston an England on a larger scale. We have no national life of our own. There is no career here for the youth who is not in temperament a middle-class Englishman.

Poor Charles Francis Adams tried desperately to be a middle-class Englishman. That is what America stands for. She proclaims proudly to the world that the son, the friendless son, of the European peasant, may come here and by his own industry and thrift, raise himself to equality with the middle-class Englishman. I think the boast is justified by results, although a Socialist candidate for the Presidency does not. Boston, at any rate, has made this the national idea. Boston has made our country, on the whole, difficult for the minority of us who are not middle-class English. But think of the grand times the majority have! The republic was established for the majority, to whom it means hope. I consider it a genuine hope and no illusion. Jones may

be down, financially, to-day. Next week he will be selling for eighteen cents a ribbon that cost him two cents. He may invent a fox trot. He may hit upon a new blend in cigarettes, or write another "Three Weeks."

If it be objected that I point only to the more glittering rewards, let me note the plenitude of minor prizes in American life. Consider the vast treasure in the saving banks! What multitudes own their homes! Ah! America, as the colleges say, has "made good." Poor Charles Francis Adams! So modest he was, so simple, so unassuming! America could no more "assimilate" him than she could "assimilate" Edgar Allan Poe. Here we have the real peril of the republic. It cannot assimilate whatever is most highminded, most generous, most gifted, in its own youth. The republic can assimilate the European immigrant who arrives with nothing and who leaves a vast brewery as his monument. The republic is incapable of assimilating its native son who, inheriting a fortune, lets it fritter away in his

eagerness to paint a picture or make a great sonnet.

It is customary to say that all this is Boston's fault. As they read the Adams autobiography, the critics scold Boston. But Boston is America. Take Boston out of our history and there would be no United States as we understand the term. Boston has created the only intellectual life we have. The spiritual forces which have asserted any vitality with us were released first of all in Boston. The stamp of Boston was on the character of every American whose life is a record of true achievement. To condemn Boston is to indict the whole American people. Nevertheless, there is an outbreak from time to time, against Boston. Protests are heard on such subjects as high caste Brahmans, Calvinist theology, culture. I think these protests arise from a perception in the mind of Americans that the æsthetic and intellectual life of their country is inadequate. A scapegoat must be found. Boston is highly available.

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Charles Francis Adams, being imperfectly Americanized, could never act or think like a middle-class Englishman. He was never assimilated. He must have been assimilated had he reached our shores as an infant in the arms of a Balkan mother. America shows more and more how difficult it has become for her to assimilate the native American, to make him more English than the English. This, I think, explains the eagerness of the middle aged and the elderly in our land to censor, to control the young. Sociology, in our country, signifies the regulation of all who are young by those who are not young.

If the young are discovered in the act of doing anything, a sort of pandemonium ensues among those who are not young. Some fresh form of censorship is invented at once, some additional authority is given to men with gray hair. It grows increasingly difficult for the young to escape arrest, to hold meetings without an invasion by the police, to proclaim an idea without being hauled up before a magis-

trate for the offense of thinking aloud. American hostility to beauty and democracy asserts itself just now through the medium of a war on all youth. In their bewilderment at the ruthlessness with which they are hounded by the middle aged and the elderly in our republic, the young rush to certain conclusions. Many of them think it is all the fault of John D. Rockefeller. Others will tell you that our competitive individualism is to blame. The best dressed element among the young incline to a suspicion that things would be better for them if all women voted. On one point I do find myself able to agree. This is the most terrible of all republics to be young in unless one be a Howells heroine.

The scapegoat to me is Boston. I felt sure of that long before this wonderful autobiography of the second Charles Francis Adams came my way. Think of it! His father a minister to England, his grandfather our President, to say nothing of his never-to-be-forgotten great-grandfather. Yet he did not

become a middle-class Englishman. Boston had failed in his case—or was it Harvard?

Ah, that Boston of Howells's! I do not care a snap of my finger for a view of the harbor into which all that tea was so gloriously thrown. My delight is all with the Boston to which Bartley brought his bride, the Boston of which grim old Lapham was the solid man, the Boston of that delicious family of Coreys—if that be the way to spell the great name. They tell me the town has greatly changed since the Boston of Howells took its place in literature beside the Paris of Balzac and the London of Thackeray. Never mind! I have never been to Boston, but when I pay my first visit I shall seek the decayed gentility of the street in which the Pythoness resided. If the changes of which they tell me have, indeed, taken place, I shall not feel consoled by Faneuil Hall. The glory of Boston is its position in the world of Howells. I know that Florence is a great background of his, that he has had his native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin on the

Grand Canal itself, that he has invaded New York and the middle west. To me the greatness of Howells associates itself with that Boston period that has all New England for its province. The rightful ruler in the world of Howells comes from a line of New England ancestors. In his men I love the lovers who have neither psychological insight nor imagination nor fancy, and who, nevertheless, write book reviews and embark upon literary careers. I love the mothers whose daughters have that stern morality and those nonentities of brothers. I sit amazed as the wooden sticks of the Howells world go through the motions of humanity, for they are a race without vision, without the eye that flames from a fire within. How coldly intellectualized is the goodness of that Boston clergyman, David Sewell! Until I had read "The Minister's Charge," there always seemed to me a mystery in the native American of Anglo-Saxon origin, in his hostility to democracy, his concealment of his opposition to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom

of any kind, behind a highly respectable Fourth-of-Julyism. Careful consideration of the sufferings of Lemuel Barker has given me the key to his mystery. There is something indescribable in the fact that the decision of the question respecting Lemuel Barker—rested with that perfect gentleman, the Reverend David Sewell. Was Lemuel Barker a poet? No! The negative of the Reverend David is emphatic. It makes me think of Emerson's dismissal of Poe as a jingle man.

What particularly strikes me in following the tale of Lemuel Barker's apprenticeship is that Howells himself fails to see precisely what the Reverend David Sewell fails to see. Lemuel Barker is a poet to the marrow of his bones. I suspect he was a very great poet, although Howells cherishes no suspicion of that kind. A similarity in the early circumstances of the poet George Crabbe in London and those of Lemuel Barker in Boston arrests my attention. There are differences between the two cases, of course, the significant one being that in London

there was an Edmund Burke for George Crabbe to go to, while in Boston there lurked that Reverend What's-his-name to do for Lemuel Barker. The magnificent thing in the tale of the boy in Boston is his instinctive realization that the minister is no poet. That is the charm of this tale, although Howells could not admit that, Lemuel Barker is not sophisticated enough to see the point and it never really occurs to the nice and kind and good Reverend Gentleman, despite his offer to conduct Lemuel into the presence of a publisher. The notion that anybody connected with the office of a publisher in the Boston of Howells could decide whether Lemuel Barker was or was not a poet is a sample of the intellectual goods of that greatest of all unconscious humorists since Bottom the Weaver—the Reverend David Sewell.

But how are we to explain the attitude of Howells to his hero? Lemuel Barker, we must remember, is one of the impressive male characters in the world of Howells, as natural to

the environment as if he were Silas Lapham in all that merchant's glory, or a member of the Corey family in all their mediocrity. Lemuel, however, is a poet of genius even if Howells never discovers it, and the tragedy of Lemuel's apprenticeship is wholly in the fact that Boston extinguishes his genius. The day arrives when Lemuel, too, brays like Bottom the Weaver, when he can say that the poem he brought to Boston did not amount to much. I know better. Boston had put out the divine fire within him. Lemuel Barker, wandering about Tremont Street or through the Common, was a man who stood at the parting of the ways between realism and romanticism. That is what Howells, in his revelation of his own literary passions, has to say of a certain genius whose tales he once devoured, a genius, he complains, who "remained content to use the materials of realism and produce the effect of romanticism." We are getting here a Howells verdict upon Charles Reade. "He had not the clear ethical conscience which forced George

Romanticism

Eliot to be realistic when probably her artistic prepossessions were romantic." At last I know why George Eliot went to live with a George Henry Lewes. The artistic prepossessions triumphed over that clear ethical conscience, unless we are to follow the example of her transcendental friends by refusing to condone her actual marriage with another man. She stood at the parting of the ways between realism and romanticism, too, for we must all do it at some time or other.

It is not a matter of choice but of temperament, destiny, genius, character, and Howells is a realist because, whatever the accident of his birth, Boston is his spiritual home. In that detail is the explanation of the world of Howells, the world of the native American of Anglo-Saxon origin, the world in which psychological insight is never combined with imagination and fancy. This explains not only the world of Howells, but the whole American world.

Boston is its spiritual home.

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William Dean Howells

David Sewell is no longer a Boston clergyman but a chief justice in a western state, blighting ever so many Lemuel Barkers with his decisions. Members of the Corey family sit beside Bartley Hubbard in the boards and on the committees that rule railroads, banks and stock exchanges. That masterpiece of romanticism, the constitution of the United States, is handed over for interpretation to the men of the world of Howells—the Howells women may be at it next—and in all Euripides there is not a tragedy with a catastrophe so dire.

The service rendered to our country by the realism of Howells, as opposed to the romanticism he deplores, consists, then, in his revelation to us of the souls of the Bartley Hubbards, the David Sewells, the Silas Laphams. The preference of Howells for the realism which has been the instrument of his revelations is natural. The imaginative writer who is primarily a stylist will insist that style affords the test of greatness in literature. The novelist who ex-

cels in the delineation of types and manners thinks no literature great unless it reveals character. Hence, nearly all criticism by a man of creative genius amounts to a glorification—often unconscious—of the particular thing in which he excels. The result has been to discredit much criticism by writers of the highest rank. This result is unfortunate. A master of the lyric forms who has no patience with epics may be excused for disparaging Homer. Homer might retort with crushing effect to Poe's contention that a genuine poem is necessarily short. The criticism that comes to us in the name of a great writer is of value only when that writer is dealing with his particular specialty. For instance, we are not to take seriously Anthony Trollope's disparagement of the novels of Wilkie Collins, because Wilkie Collins was a master of plot and Anthony Trollope, who excelled in the delineation of character, found plot a disagreeable tax on his memory.

Literary criticism from successful writers,

and even from "great" ones, must be received with the caution inspired, let us say, by a dissertation on surgery from a physician who had specialized all his life in children's diseases.

This is why we have critics but the mission of the critic is not to instruct writers. He should instruct readers.

IX

FACTORS DETERMINING THE RANK OF HOWELLS AS A CLASSIC

LONG and brilliant as has been the reign of the author of "The Rise of Silas Lapham" in the literary annals of our land, no adequate interpretation of him has appeared. The idea of Howells as a "successful writer" has lowered his prestige with the young men and women to whom literature is primarily a fine art. Let us risk a review of the whole subject from this technical standpoint.

The truth is that notwithstanding his "success," Howells is a great writer—so very great a writer that we are in no danger of overestimating his importance. No literary artist of his rank has yet appeared in the Anglo-Saxon world to supersede him. The tests that determine a matter of this kind are simple, well

known and easily applied. They have reference to style, plot, delineation of character, dialogue and mastery of the narrative art. By narrative art is meant the ability of a novelist to tell his story well as distinguished from the merit of the story itself.

If these tests be applied to the work of Howells in the field of fiction, one is impressed by the ease with which he scores heavily on all counts. He remains, for example, the supreme stylist. He has never been surpassed by any novelist in his capacity to write dialogue effectively and in due relation to character and plot. His knowledge of character is manifest in his feminine portraits. Plot with him is highly effective, even if it take the form of a mere emotional outburst in a situation.

Many a successful writer emerges with credit from but two or three of these tests. Howells comes brilliantly through them all.

We are therefore justified in anticipating the verdict of posterity on the subject of the art of Howells. The conception of what constitutes

literary art may be modified but as the exponent of a school, the position of Howells can not be modified in the historical sense. He will retain at least the importance of the great artist in any field, the significance attaching to great work always. His public will endure. There will be readers of Howells for centuries.

The essential fact regarding the work of William Dean Howells is that it discloses a great literary artist. Howells is not an artist only. He is a novelist of power although not, perhaps, of the widest scope. He has a precious insight into the heart of woman. He can exploit the dramatic value of a situation without descending to mere theatricals. He knows a story when he finds one and he devotes himself to the task of telling it.

Other merits of the kind are his. The equipment of William Dean Howells as a novelist, apart from his ability as critic of life and literature, places him in the very greatest company. Above and beyond all this is the fact that Howells is so great a literary artist. His

artistry is in perfect proportion with his effect as a whole. The cunning of his workmanship resembles the sartorial effects of a Beau Brummel or a Duke of Buckingham at his best—the style is magnificent, but too perfectly appropriate to lapse into affectation or run into excess.

William Dean Howells is therefore a master of style, a great writer. His manner of saying a thing has an interest of its own without reference to the thing he happens to be saying. The English language has proved singularly responsive to the touch of William Dean Howells. It yields to him all its subtleties and it never betrays him into the unintelligibilities of writers who are stylists and nothing more. The style of Howells is so highly individualized that a critic would soon recognize his work, however anonymously purveyed.

The beauty of his style is never sacrificed to its individuality. It is not a style that has been caught from anyone else. Neither is it the style to which his reader must bring a literary

sophistication of any kind. He can be read with an exquisite ease.

This aspect of the greatness of William Dean Howells as a writer explains the permanence of his position as a classic. One, at least, of his tales will last as long as, say, "The Vicar of Wakefield," and for much the same reason.

The reason is style.

Much confusion of thought, to repeat what I say elsewhere, has been occasioned by the statement that before anyone can tell a story, he must have a story to tell. The saying is glib, but it overlooks the fact that every one of us has a story to tell. Even the idiot has his story to tell, and the child has his and the woman has hers. To get the story told—that is the agony. If that poor old man could but get his story told in the right way!

The secret of style is all in that.

Consider Hamlet.

With all deference to Doctor Dryasdust and in defiance of the theatrical managers, be it noted that Hamlet lives through the vitality of

style. Hamlet, like all things real as literature, is a triumph of style. Style, in its essence, is a mystery. William Dean Howells is invested, as a writer, with this baffling atmosphere of genius. The style he manifests with such beauty of manner and such finish is shot through and through with humor. This humor is masculine in its vigor and feminine in its intuition. It colors his style somewhat as a sympathetic moon will saturate a summer night. Then that effect of humor will be withdrawn and one of tenderness or of tragedy even will be substituted.

And love! There are emotional phases of the style of William Dean Howells during which we all swim in love or swoon with love. Never do we feel ridiculous then or betrayed.

It is not merely that William Dean Howells knows all the sweet anguishes of love, although we know that he must. He conveys the poetry of the passion through the resisting medium of a prosaic setting. His American environment never subdues his artistry. He can tell a beau-

tiful story about the ugliest thing. His realism is unsparing.

Closely associated with the perfection of the style of Howells is the perfection of his form. The structure of one of his novels is as rare and as delicate as any Greek vase over which a Keats has raved. No French novelist excels Howells in giving form to the structure of a tale and not one Englishman of his period can approach him.

In any consideration of the merits of Howells as an artist, we are impressed by the extent to which he displays the more glorious characteristics of the school so often referred to as decadent. However repellent we may find the themes of a decadent writer, we have sometimes to admit that his imagination is more constructive than that of his Philistine brother, his fancy livelier, his metaphor more vivid, his insight sometimes, odd as this must seem, more spiritual. The very striking fact about Howells is that he brings to the service of an unblushing and unconscious Philistinism, in

perfect good faith, all the shining genius that transfigures sin in the verses of a Baudelaire or the prose of an Oscar Wilde.

The genius of Howells is a sister to theirs, but we find it in the position of Mary Magdalen after her conversion. An atmosphere totally different from that of decadence is breathed by the heroines of Howells, but the art with which their souls are bared to us is the authentic art that has come down to us through the few masters of the written word. Shelley tells us that all the poets have in reality written but one poem and it might be added to this that the supreme prose writers have had but one style—the greatest.

All literary art is in its perfect exemplifications the same and the work of a Howells is like that of a Balzac, the work of a Turgenieff like that of a Flaubert even. Temperaments, characters, situations differ, but literary art is to Bourget what it was to Catullus. No misconception could be so complete as that which ascribes the art of William Dean Howells to

this "influence" or that. He has given the world an account of his literary passions but those passions could not make him a writer.

Howells being a born writer, his technique is instinctive. His greatness has been obscured to his countrymen in the second decade of this century by their lack of enthusiasm for our national literature. A quite preposterous subjection of the American mind to the provincialism of all British literary standards has kept it from an adequate estimate of Howells.

His artistry is suspected, it is surmised to exist, but no critic of consequence has yet proved bold enough to assign Howells his rightful position as one of the few great literary artists in the department of prose. British writers who are his inferiors in capacity and far below him in achievement get a recognition in America that Howells missed in the days of his greatest vogue.

He is easily the greatest of the American victims of the British literary superstition. His acceptance of the Victorian cult of the

family is another explanation of a sort of neglect into which his genius has fallen. In the world of William Dean Howells all human relationships are those of American ladies and gentlemen, either with one another or with their inferiors.

Culture consists of a very ludicrous condescension of attitude to this country on the part of New Englanders who have lived in Italy.

A Howells hero has an inexpressibly amusing respect for a lady. A Howells lady is inconceivably Anglo-Saxon, incredibly Philistinised by European influences at first or second hand and never for a moment suspecting that.

She carries on the most extraordinary conversations in a highly sophisticated manner, during which she is appalled, or retains her presence of mind sufficiently to make a characteristic observation in her usual manner. The supreme object of the earthly existence of men and women in a Howells atmosphere is to have things go on as usual. There is an agitating possibility that they may not.

Epigram

Upon this possibility the plot may turn.

The dialogue in a Howells novel is almost invariably managed with a consummate artistry. No writer of fiction shows an easier mastery of this most difficult of all the departments of his art. The characters in a Howells novel reveal themselves completely in what they say. Their conversation is now and then elaborate, but it has a definite relation to the progress of events and never does it inspire dread or an eagerness to skip a page. All the resources of his genius are brought by Howells to bear upon the quality of his dialogue. The dialogue in "The Kentons" is at times a miracle of effect. His technique here has been unblushingly imitated for a generation.

Speaking in a somewhat general way, it is to be noted that a Howells hero does not deal much in epigram and a Howells heroine does not get a paradox thrown at her in a dozen chapters. The Howells world is filled with middle aged men whose cynicism is of the quaintest Victorian kind. The background is

usually that United States of America which was so much more Victorian than the Prince Consort.

All standards of conduct are Anglo-Saxon to the really nice people of the Howells world. We are concerned for the most part with the affairs of people in easy circumstances who are interesting to us not on their own account, but because of the glory they derive from the magnificence of their creator's art.

It is a dazzling art and that art makes him a classic.

X

HOWELLS AS THE EXPONENT OF OUR MANNERS

THE method of William Dean Howells, his characteristic practice of the art of fiction, will yet sustain an important relation to a controversy that agitates historians. Is history one of the sciences or is it a literary art? Many a mile of typewriter ribbons has unwound itself to keep this discussion going and we remain uncertain still whether the form of history is that of narrative. Prescott is no historian, according to one faction. The novelist who adequately portrays the manners of his period is a historian, in the light of another theory of the subject, at any rate. Those historians who plume themselves upon their "science" insist that their concern is essentially with manners and with morals, and with the economic conditions underlying them.

From this standpoint and, perhaps, without suspecting this aspect of his work, Howells has become the social historian of a formative period in the annals of his native land. This was made possible—I am now considering Howells the historian of manners apart from the artist—by the intimacy of his acquaintance with our national character. He has no illusions on the subject of that character. We Americans are not a gifted people, not a nation of artists, like the French, nor a land in which everyone has at least a touch of genius, like Italy, or a tinge of metaphysics, or of piety, like aliens under still other skies. This accounts for the lack of color in the whole world of Howells, but he brings out a point which I think is not at all apparent to commentators upon our manners and our morals, our ideals and our standards. These are all determined for us by native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin. They are our "best people." We ape them. We are ashamed of anything which establishes a gulf between ourselves and them.

If genius or efficiency establish such a gulf, away with both. We live in dread of not being just the sort of person whom Helen Harkness can possibly have heard of.

Helen, as I may be excused for observing, is the heroine of "A Woman's Reason," one of the innumerable young ladies living in that extraordinary Boston of Howells's. She is in love in her Boston fashion—I do not mean at all to be flippant—and at the period to which I refer she is obliged to take refuge in an ordinary boarding house. Helen was amused by some of the talk at the table, and still she was tortured by a doubt respecting the Evanses. "She could not tell exactly why; one never can tell exactly why, especially if one is a lady." But Helen was painfully aware of having never heard of these Evanses. Helen was uncertain in the Boston manner of people of whom she had never heard. The effectiveness with which Helen in this situation is made to stand for Boston in all the tremendous implications, social and cultural, of that geographical

term, makes "A Woman's Reason" important as a historical document, apart from its interest as a work of art. The Boston attitude to New York is beautifully realized for the benefit of the student of our unofficial aristocracy. Like so many of the Howells tales, this masterpiece among them suggests that our institutions exist for the production of lovely young ladies for the privileged few.

The privileged few have standards which are fixed or fluctuating according to the temperaments of these young ladies. I note the amused skepticism of the reference by Howells himself to Woman's theory that she makes and unmakes the man in her life. I suspect him of believing that women are megalomaniacs and certainly his best women are conceited. Still, the manners of our American world—the "moeurs," as Balzac would say, the "mores," to go back pedantically to Cicero—are the manners of women. They are the manners of people who must protect themselves not only from the vulgarity of an outside world, but also

from its efficiency. Efficiency is a menace to these people—the efficiency of the vulgar!

In this matter of efficiency, we Americans, according to Howells, and I believe him, have neither manners nor morals at all. The only character in Howells who is at the same time a native American of Anglo-Saxon origin and a man of manners in the fine French sense, is the head of the clan of Corey. This irresistible Bostonian makes his appearance in nearly all the great Howells novels, and he is no less significant, no less American in figure as an accident of environment than is the Leatherstocking of Cooper. This man Corey is an authentic example of genius. He creates nothing himself, but his personality is inspirational. A true artist would derive at once from Corey that most precious of all things, a consciousness of being understood. The society of artists is the only society for which he really cares. He has the characteristics of his temperament, which include the manners of the "humanities." Corey knows how to treat an artist. This

amounts to saying that Corey is a peculiar person to encounter in his native land, where artists have necessarily to be rated according to their commercial success. In the botanical sense of the term, Corey is a "sport." The Corey family must take care of him as if he were a sort of lunatic. Corey is, from the standpoint of what he signifies, the key to Howells as a social historian. There is no place for him in American society, because he does not make progress pecuniarily. Corey retrogrades pecuniarily. If he had added to his wealth as he added to his collection of beautiful things, he would not have been out of place, exotic, daft over this hobby and that.

In the clarity with which he exposes all this, Howells is the supreme historian of manners, one of the great psychologists. Only in his novels do we have a reflection of the gray predominating in our national life. On the other hand, he does full justice to the physical comfort we affect. Nothing is more real than the gormandizing of his rich people living in the

country, and yet he seizes and conveys the ease of a boarding house where the table is good. We are edified by one in "April Hopes." The other is the scene of Helen's tragedies in "A Woman's Reason," one of the few novels of "manners" that can be called great. It may have been written for the purpose of elucidating the essentially American idea of what constitutes a lady. The heroine is a lady in that sense. The whole of her world is prostrate before her in consequence. It must be conceded that Helen is a nice girl. She is a fine flower of the caste system of cultivation, like so many other Howells ladies. What particularly strikes one in any consideration of Helen is her inefficiency. She cannot turn her hand to anything that will yield an honest living. She paints things for which there is no æsthetic justification. She writes unprintable book reviews. She trims impossible bonnets. In all this waste of her own time, as well as of the time of other people, the heroine is tolerated, endured, put up with, because she is a lady.

She belongs to that exalted caste. This instinct for caste in the native American of Anglo-Saxon origin has been exploited by Howells in nearly all his studies of our manners, but in the misadventures of Helen the inefficiency of the caste emerges. One is indeed astonished that American ladies and gentlemen of the best birth and breeding can be so extraordinarily mediocre, so desperately inefficient. That they make a merit of this inefficiency, that they cultivate a kind of pride in it as a badge of social superiority is to be expected. An aristocracy always does that sort of thing, and in our manners we Americans are the most aristocratic republic that ever made a mockery of the rights of man!

XI

THE AMERICAN ARISTOCRACY AND THE COREY FAMILY

In this clever exposure of the American's antipathy to democracy, Howells has occasionally gone far. "A Hazard of New Fortunes" is an instance of what I mean. American inaccessibility to ideas is neatly revealed in the course of that adventure. I think, nevertheless, that Helen Harkness is the type of native American inefficiency in its Anglo-Saxon feminine form. She is very lovable, very incompetent, very refined, very much of a lady, very much of a failure, acutely conscious of her social position. The difficulty with her is that she has inherited the inadequacy of those whose ancestors came over in the Mayflower. The British aristocrat with whom she discusses her caste calls it the Mayblossom! It seems that

the caste loses nothing by spinning although it would never do to brew. The British aristocrat can make nothing of it.

I think Howells brings out very clearly in all this the passion for aristocracy that is at the foundation of the American character, that awe of the "best" people that no Anglo-Saxon can feel for the merely efficient. Lieutenant Fenton, for instance, although an officer in the United States Navy, incarnates caste, and naturally he is the ideal mate for Helen. No hero could be more of a hero but one follows his tremendous adventures with an uneasy feeling that he would die bravely and that this is all he ever would succeed in doing. So we take our leave of him as the husband of Helen in a big navy yard, where, I suppose, she had sons and daughters as charming, as inefficient and as high caste as their parents.

Although all these things emerge thus clearly, and perhaps with no design on the part of Howells himself, he renders his countrymen and especially his countrywomen an incidental

service by revealing their perfect charm. The imbecility of the British has filled the world with an idea that native Americans have bad manners. Apart from the amusement necessarily inspired by British incapacity to decide whether any manners are either good or bad, there is the difficulty of American charm to complicate the discussion. The manners of a person who is charming are likely to seem good, and all the people to whom Howells introduces us are charming, some in one way and some in another. Those rural New Englanders of his are irresistible, whether we encounter them in their parlors or in their kitchens. They are positively Greek in their alertness, suggesting in all they do and say that the people in that Mayflower had left their British heaviness behind them.

This characteristic charm of the American people is at its best in those Coreys to whom I have referred before. They have managed to get into their heads an idea that efficiency is more important from a social point of view than

money itself. The women of the Corey family never quite assimilate that doctrine. We see them sticking to their side of the house while Lemuel Barker reads aloud to papa. The eagerness of that poor papa to find somebody among the native Americans with whom he can exchange ideas instead of the suggestions or the shadows of ideas leads him into such queer company! A panic of the well bred kind ensues when a young man of the family weds outside the purple. As we trace these Coreys from one of these novels to another, we seem to find Howells making ever clearer the truth that we Americans are a monarchical people living by a historical accident under a republican form of government. The native stock lacks the genius to express the poetry of republican institutions. To Helen Harkness, for instance, and to her circle, and in the circle of the Coreys this republicanism of our institutions is a jest. To the American poor it is no jest. The American poor are a republican poor because of the public schools, just as the

Old Corey

American rich are a monarchical rich because of the private schools and in saying this I have reference solely to manners as elucidated through the realism of Howells and not to anything particularly political. I am thinking among other things of Helen Harkness's attitude to her fellow boarders and of Miss Vane and of Sybil in their relations with Lem.

The astonishing thing about this native American aristocracy as we study its manners in the novels of Howells—he is the student of manners in the wide sense—is its blank unconsciousness of its own limitations. Lord Rainford, going about the New England of Miss Harkness, sees these limitations. To that exceptional member of the Corey famliy, freak that he is, these limitations are painfully obvious. He knows that he is good for nothing. No other member of that exalted caste has any such attitude to himself. They have all, these people, a sense of being very superior, even that wretched newspaper man of a Bartley Hubbard. As for the "intellect-

uals" of the Howells world, the Ford who loves Egeria, and the Evans who accepts the fashionable young lady's book review because she is of such a good family, and all the rest, they accept the monarchical manners of the best American society with no suspicion that there could be any other.

As an exponent of American manners, then, Howells shows us up. We are prone on our faces before a monarchical idol. This might be less important were it not for the appalling incapacity of our best people. They are all so second rate that their monarchical manners do not imperil our institutions at all. These native Americans fumble at democracy precisely as they potter around "Art." There is a perpetual prattle among the heroes and the heroines of Howells about something or other that is meant to convey the effect of culture. An effect is conveyed. It is an effect only—like the effect of rain in a theater when a piece of sheet-iron is shaken behind the scenes.

The closeness of the scrutiny bestowed by

Cornelia

Howells upon his types of character makes his pictures of lowly American life no less significant than his studies of the manners of our ineffectual aristocracy. No one seems to have studied the manners of our native American Anglo-Saxon poor with such results from an artistic standpoint as Howells. Cornelia Root, for instance, who helped her mother "take boarders" and then went to Boston to study "Art," is the creation of a great artist. She has no illusions, this Cornelia, and she is true to her breed in being destitute of genius, but how bravely she paints on in her poverty! Her character is that of steel. Her words are put together remorselessly, her meaning stands out like a bare tree against a winter snow. Yet how interesting she is, what humor she has. She has the vivid reality of every character in Howells because she is "a study of manners," as the French say, and she has the inexplicable charm of the cold, stern New England woman and her humor, her rare, fascinating unsparing humor. And then there is S'tira Dudley with

her mature woman friend, striving for that place in the paper box factory and looking so fashionable and clinging so fondly to her young man, much to his embarrassment. Nor must I omit even in this hasty mention of some impressive effects in character the bloomers of Mrs. Barker. What tragedy unspeakable is made to invest them, a note of doom and gloom and how, through all that, the Americanism of the detail speaks home and fills one with a sort of silent pride in the wearer. She was our countrywoman.

Our countrymen! Our countrywomen! It is they who come before us in the pages of the great historian of our manners. If Howells has no illusions, he does establish the greatness of the New Englander on the moral plane. His American is a hero. He accounts for the renown of the Boston woman as the glory of the Anglo-Saxon race.

XII

THE HOWELLS PHILOSOPHY OF WOMAN

MEN show their youth and inexperience when they regard any relation with a woman as a sort of game to be played as an exhibition of superior skill. I think this is an important principle deducible from the attitude of William Dean Howells to woman as a social institution. It is difficult to understand why he has been deemed a critic of woman, her enemy. It would be easy to pick out of such tales as "A Fearful Responsibility" and "A Chance Acquaintance" of the earlier period, or out of "A Hazard of New Fortunes" which began the what I may consider the later period of Howells, ever so many remarks which suggest lack of faith in woman. That method is not fair. One ought to take the tales and essays and farces and novels as a whole—Howells has

written some sixty or seventy books, remember —and deduce the philosophy from them. It is practical rather than profound. I have tried more than once to extract this philosophy. I seem ever to get the same result. No man ever wrote great poetry unless he revered poetry, or painted a great picture unless he glorified the magic of mere paint or had a great love affair unless he looked into the heart of woman reverently. That is the gist of much in the writings of Howells. The words are my own. The gospel is his. The message is ever the same but its theme varies. How wonderfully he reveals his knowledge of woman in "A Modern Instance":

> The spectacle of a love affair in which the woman gives more of her heart than the man gives of his is so pitiable that we are apt to attribute a kind of merit to her, as if it were a voluntary self-sacrifice for her to love more than her share. Not only other men, but other women, look on with this canonizing compassion; for women have a lively power of imagining themselves in the place of any sister who suffers in matters of sentiment, and are eager to espouse the common cause in commiserating her. Each of them pictures herself simi-

larly wronged or slighted by the man she likes best, and feels how cruel it would be if he were to care less for her than she for him; and for the time being, in order to realize the situation, she loads him with all the sins of omission proper to the culprit in the alien case. But possibly there is a compensation in merely loving, even where the love given is out of all proportion to the love received.

How strange women are! That is the conclusion to which all men come, provided they have studied women to any purpose. I have talked about women with many men who knew them and in the end they arrived, in some form or another, at the same conclusion: how strange women are! This is the lesson of "April Hopes."

Never lose a fear of women, a dread of them, a species of awe. Otherwise one risks the fate of the tamer of lions who, through familiarity with such powerful creatures, grew careless and was devoured. I would call this the gospel of "Doctor Breen's Practice."

No man ever persuaded a woman to do what she did not want to do. Many a woman has

persuaded a man to do what he hated even to think of. In general, it seems true that women despise a man who allows them to persuade him into a course condemned by his own judgment. There is, too, the odd fact to consider that women think very little of the man who permits his infatuation to carry him too far. Of course, infatuation must go far—yet not too far. The trouble is to know where to draw the line. The man who knew was Mark Antony, but he was mature and so was the woman for whom he threw the world away. I get this lesson from "Indian Summer."

To love and have one's love returned—that is life. The rest is not worth while, even to Napoleon. Who would not prefer the lips of the woman who yields them gladly, to many victories like Austerlitz? The qualities in men that appeal most to women are noble qualities. Jesus won the love of more women than Don Juan ever even met. The victories won by a man over a woman are always too dearly paid for. Test carefully, before believing it, any

statement regarding women that comes to you in the form of an epigram. Women are instinctively so prone to hero worship that they regard with veneration the man whom they cannot corrupt. Howells says these things in many ways in his various books.

If I get the meaning of Howells in his inquiry into the affairs of the Corey family, I should never let a woman lure me into a lie. Women take refuge in lies because their sense of reality is defective or, rather, the reality with which they are in intimate contact is not the reality of men, the reality with which men deal. Hence accuracy of statement is of less importance morally in a woman's life than in a man's. Never, then, be lured by a woman into telling a lie. Always be truthful to a woman. It gives a man an extraordinary power over her.

Even very bad women love to be treated as if they were very good and they will become good—for the sake of your approval. But the woman who can be very good or rather seem

very good for your sake can be very wicked for some other man's sake. The man who presumes upon accident or circumstance to become familiar with a woman or to treat her with any lack of personal respect is intellectually second-rate. A woman loves to see a man work. She has more respect for a man who can work than she has for a man who can make love. She can teach a man to make love. She cannot teach a man how to work. Few delusions respecting women are more credited than the one which attributes to them a sneaking respect for a rake. This is the moral of "The Lady of the Aroostook" in particular, but it is drawn elsewhere.

The difficulty in teaching a man any truth respecting women is found in the fact that what is worth knowing about them involves a platitude. For instance, the assertion that only good women are worth while is a platitude—and how true! Women always estimate too highly the power of a woman's beauty over a man. Beautiful women are not desired nearly

as much as the poets would have us suppose. Consider the fate of Irene Lapham. However, most delusions respecting women are disseminated by the poets.

In the long run, a woman is the best judge of a man. A man never finds out just which woman loved him until he is so weary of love! Clever remarks about women are not necessarily true. Middle-aged women give the most joy to their lovers. That seems very odd and is a circumstance worthy of our very closest scrutiny, but for some strange reason it remains neglected. It is the theme of "Indian Summer." Only a vulgar man ever befools a woman in love. On the other hand, a capacity for love is rare, like a capacity for statesmanship or poetry.

Exercise the utmost caution before revealing to the woman you love anything that could be interpreted as jealousy. Never rush into the opposite mistake of praising a rival unduly or of trying to conceal your jealousy under the guise of some other feeling or suggestion.

William Dean Howells

When you have failed to extract from a woman an assurance that she loves you, do not, in your pain, say something that may hurt or bewilder her. Few statements regarding women are more absurd than the assertion that "although man's love is of his life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence." The love a man really feels is his whole existence. On the other hand, a woman's love can be of her life "a thing apart." An impression to the contrary is due to the genius of Byron as a poet—he having made the absurd statement in question. Byron was a profligate. What he said about women was from that point of view accurate enough. He knew about women exactly what a profligate—a charming, fascinating profligate—would naturally know—nothing more.

A woman is never afraid of love, whatever she may seem. A man always is. The connection, or rather the relation, between the love of a man and a woman, and the love of God is subtle, unexplored and of more importance,

perhaps, than the mystery of the ether or the electrical nature of matter.

The general effect upon me of the tales in which Howells exploits the Italian scene is that a woman may admire you immensely without loving you. Young men seldom realize the importance of this truth. A woman is quick to distinguish between the technique of a man's love-making and the feeling that prompts it. This explains why so many men who ought to be successful in love fail ingloriously while men less gifted who feel sincerely, deeply, triumph.

Love, to be sure, is one of the arts, but that fact implies all the more sincerity and truth in the artist. Women realize this perfectly and that is why they take such an interest in artists, who are the great lovers. Even Nelson, hero of the Nile, was, as a lover, the artist pure and simple, as was Mark Antony. Those who say that women vary forget that they vary within limits, like the heavens or the kaleidoscope. Women do not vary to infinity.

William Dean Howells

If you cannot hold a woman without lying to her, let her go at once. She will only find you out in the end. A lie told to a woman by a man is proof positive of his incapacity to cope with the situation. Even a noble, beautiful lie is proof of weakness here.

I think young Corey learned more about love than any other Howells young man. He learned that the love a woman gives you will be sullied by every deceit you make her practise, every duplicity of which you are guilty. The world's great lovers neither lied nor intrigued, although they sinned. When you are confronted with the alternative of confessing that you love a woman or of dissembling the fact to the world, confess the truth. The consequences are immediately embarrassing, but in the long run safest because they include a mastery over the woman. Where the heart of a woman is concerned it is possible to snatch victory from defeat by being a good loser. In love, however, only a rare and chosen few among men are good losers. Such seems to be

the moral of all that Corey went through as a lover.

The young men who figure conspicuously in Howells as the suitors of his heroines and as little else—the Lieutenant Fentons, the Mr. Fords, and even the Lemuel Barkers—learn before they are through that the more you strive to reveal your good points to a woman the more you insult her intelligence. She can find out your merits for herself.

A woman always gives a man the degree of encouragement she deems necessary. If you see a woman again and again and cannot pluck up your courage to speak, be sure the trouble is in her lack of appreciation, her lack of love. She does not want you to speak, at any rate just yet.

A man's difficulty with a woman is less to win her love than to manage her after her love is won. The management of the woman who loves you is a tremendous task and it must not be undertaken as if it were a sort of game. In general, the man should grow on the woman,

reveal better and better points, like strength, courage, gentleness.

No matter how much you love a woman, there will be moments when she will bore you terribly and no matter how much she loves you there will be times when she will want to horsewhip you. Success in love depends upon the negotiation of such crises.

Pay no attention to the gossip you hear respecting the faults of the woman you love. Find out all about her at first hand, never at second hand. The knowledge you gain about a woman from others is less valuable than the knowledge you derive from actual contact.

Don't sit down in front of a woman and worship her. Not only does this spoil her, but it reflects very much upon your intelligence in her eyes. Don't let her worship you because that is certain to spoil you. Nevertheless, you must be very, very sweet. Women admire sweetness in a man beyond measure, but it must be "sweetness" in the French sense.

Suggesting this, that and the other to the

woman you love means the introduction of complications of one kind and another. Most of the troubles of young men in love consists in their recklessness. They put ideas into the woman's head that could never have occurred to herself. When a woman loves you the fewer ideas you give her the better.

This by no means exhausts the Howells philosophy of woman in love, nor is it an adequate presentation of it. Like all efforts to set down in one's own way the message of a master it fails because there is so much said. No writer of any age repays study like Howells when one longs to read the book of woman —not Shakespeare himself. Howells knew one type of woman extremely well, the type to which the Lapham girls and the Corey girls belonged in spite of the difference in their social position. I detect no cynicism anywhere in his philosophy unless it be cynicism to observe, for instance, that it is always a serious matter to the women of his family when a young man gives them cause to suspect that he

is interested in some other woman. He dwells upon that in the Lapham annals. A son-in-law or brother-in-law, Howells explains, does not enter the family. He need not be caressed or made anything of. The son's wife has a claim upon the sisters which they can not deny. Some convention of the feminine sex obliges women to show affection for the son's wife, to take her to their intimacy, however odious she may be to them.

There is no great cynicism in that, is there?

XIII

THE HOWELLS MASTERPIECE

THE most effective scene in fiction to me occurs in "The Rise of Silas Lapham." There is, I know, a tremendous episode in "Ivanhoe," and more than one judicious critic has pronounced it the supreme thing. Nor can the thrill of Robinson Crusoe's discovery of that footprint in the sand be passed by in any compilation of the triumphs of narrative art. A certain swimming scene in Meredith has its champions, and they can, as the lawyers say, make out a case. Anthony Trollope deserves very honorable mention for the manner in which Mr. Slope is set turning around and around during one infatuated hour in the presence of Bertie's lame sister. What scene shall be chosen out of all fiction as its greatest is no

question to answer pontifically. It implies, too, a wider knowledge of all the world's novels than most of us gain time to acquire.

I must risk all, nevertheless, upon my own judgment and make what terms I can with the champions of the British literary superstition. The most thrilling scene in fiction reveals Irene Lapham in the bedroom of her sister Penelope. Irene has just been told that young Corey never loved her. There had been a terrible blunder from the beginning. Young Corey loved Penelope only. Rallying at once from the shock of the disclosure, Irene went with those poor trinkets of hers to Penelope. One by one she handed them over—the pin she got that very day because it was so like the one his sister wore, a newspaper account of that ranch he visited in Texas, the buttonhole bouquet he left beside his plate and which she stole, and finally the pine shaving fantastically tied up with a knot of ribbon. Irene's surrender of these trophies, the words she speaks to poor Penelope and the circumstances attend-

ing her mother's participation in the tragedy of it all render this chapter in the history of the Lapham family the great event in my career of adventure among the world's novels. I have panted after d'Artagnan, too, and sat in agony at the head of old Goriot's bed.

Not that this exhausts my praise. From the standpoint of literature regarded as a fine art, I consider "The Rise of Silas Lapham" the greatest novel ever written. In structure, that is to say in its form as distinguished from its content, it surpasses "The Egoist" of Meredith, and it is, of course, immeasurably better written. Of the pair, Howells is the best stylist. In the matter of form, structure, style, whatever we choose to call that part of the novelist's equipment which reveals him as an artist, this tale of the Laphams is more finished than the masterpieces of Flaubert. If the suggestion were not so misleading, one might liken the art with which "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is written to the art of the great French novelists generally, or to the art dis-

played in the tragic drama of the Greeks. There is something of the ease of de Maupassant or of Daudet and much of the beauty of Euripides in the manner of Howells throughout this masterpiece of his.

The cunning of the master hand is manifest in the very first chapter. We must know all about Silas Lapham from the start, who he is, what he is, his temperament and his financial and family affairs. Balzac is deplorably heavy in his masterpiece itself when he has to cope with a difficulty of this sort. Thackeray has a fashion of postponing this task until we get beyond his opening chapter. Trollope is frankly heavy and British as he fatigues us with detail respecting everybody's private affairs. In "The Rise of Silas Lapham" we are afforded all the light essential to the clarification of his mystery by that expedient of Bartley Hubbard's call at the millionaire's place of business. The journalist wants material for a character sketch. The skill with which this expedient is utilized to turn Silas Lapham inside

out before our eyes is possible in a master of the art of narrative and in a master only.

The essential quality of "The Rise of Silas Lapham," however, is poetical. "Romeo and Juliet" itself is not more deliciously pervaded, saturated with love's essence. It is a tale of the love of Irene for Tom and of Tom for Penelope, every development of the plot being critical to us because it bears, in a manner near or remote, upon that intense affair. I have been unable to call to mind a novel in which the sentiment, indeed, the passion of love has been steeped in so unsparing a realism with such an intimate knowledge of the subject matter. We are all familiar with the practice of the purveyors of the excessively romantic in the line of fiction. They insist upon talking about a thrilling story of a young girl's love. Well, "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is the most thrilling story of a young girl's love since that affair between a certain Capulet and a certain Montague.

The ease with which Howells transfers our

sympathy from Irene to Penelope is uncanny. Theoretically, she wrings our withers. She is in the most humiliating of all the dilemmas imaginable as that of any heroine. Then, too, she is beautiful, distractingly beautiful. The realization of this beauty for our benefit is so adequate that Scott himself has no young lady in all his collection who conveys so vivid, so ravishing an effect of feminine loveliness as Irene Lapham. Sweetness, too, is hers and it neither cloys nor is insipid, and still how good she is, how like nothing so much as her own perfect and imperishable self!

The most remarkable feature of "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is that it has two heroines. Irene is the heroine of the story until Corey has disclosed his love. Then that trying part of heroine is allotted to Penelope. Nothing could be more delicate than the task the novelist has undertaken here and the success that rewards it is without a parallel in the annals of imaginative literature. Apart from the qualities of Howells as a writer, this success must

be ascribed to his amazing insight into the heart of woman. In this detail alone his superiority to Meredith has not won any recognition only because Howells is an American. He brings Penelope forward and he draws Irene back with a subtlety that transfers our sympathy from one to the other completely. The tragedy of it all is exposed without compunction, especially as it affects the mother of these girls. The words of the mother as she makes Irene understand, accompanied by that harshness of manner, acquire a poignancy, a control over a reader of which only the masters of the written word possess the key.

Howells has revealed the heart of woman with all his cunning throughout this work—Mrs. Corey, for instance. Her dinner to the Laphams serves incidentally to reveal the superiority of the humor of Howells to that of Meredith. In the American, as the greater literary artist, we have a more intimate relation between an episode like that Corey dinner, for instance, and the structure of his tale as a

whole. "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is a model of structure. It is such easy reading from beginning to end. The humor, mainly at the expense of the Laphams, is eternal. Pericles and Aspasia could have enjoyed it and Aristophanes might have written it. There is that passage, for instance, between Penelope and the father of the youth she was to marry. He said he hoped they parted friends if not quite acquaintances. Penelope told her future father-in-law that she hoped they would be able to recognize each other if they ever met again.

In its revelation of American family life, this Howells masterpiece is a permanent historical document. The sweetness, the purity of the atmosphere disclosed and the simplicity of all the characters make me think of "The Vicar of Wakefield." A striking point of resemblance between them has relation to the sense of humor. It is universal, Shakespearean. The sense of humor as exploited in the tale of the Lapham family is not "American" in the terribly vulgar implication of the traves-

tied word. The American sense of humor is refined, spiritualized, at the opposite pole from the heavy British idea of it. Howells and Goldsmith are alike in the freshness, the spontaneity of their humor. I think the American is far more sophisticated. The two tales are typically Anglo-Saxon in turning upon and about the snobbishness of the race. They are alike in being models of style. I think the American has given us the best writing. The poetical quality of "The Vicar of Wakefield" and the poetical quality of "The Rise of Silas Lapham" indicate an element in common between the genius of Howells and that of Goldsmith. Each is a great humorist and a great stylist and versatile, but there is a gravity, a ballast, a sophistication in the American, an intellectuality not discoverable in the other. This difference suggests as anything else could not the significance of the "realism" with which the work of Howells is associated in some minds, as distinguished from the "romanticism" which underlies the type of fiction so

roundly censured in some of the Bostonian masterpieces of Howells.

His study of the career and the character of Silas Lapham is the most successful treatment the native American has ever received in fiction. If we are to deem the red Indian the native American, Cooper has a monopoly of the glory to be derived from his revelation in imaginative aspects according to modes of realism. I have thought of the noble Chingachgook while following with the closest scrutiny the vicissitudes of that still nobler savage, Silas Lapham. He is a true native American of Anglo-Saxon origin, this Silas, reared in all the terrible "arrivism" for which our country has come to stand. Like the breed to which he belongs, Silas Lapham is destitute of the combination of psychological insight with imagination and fancy. Incarnate in him is the unredeemed ugliness of the material prosperity of his type and of his race. He is the characteristic product of a people without genius. The emptiness, the forlornness, the drear-

iness and the dullness of the domestic life of the "successful" American are vividly experienced for us vicariously through the ordeals of Silas Lapham. He is a typical American in his ignorance of human nature, of beauty, of ideas. His conception of life takes the form of an enthusiasm for the paint he sells. Everything should be coated with that. As far as he can be said to have a theory or conception of culture at all, it is a coat of paint.

In this aspect of him, Silas Lapham is the most American thing imaginable. No inspiration could be more authentic than that which decided Howells to involve his greatest character in paint. Paint symbolizes the Silas Lapham attitude to life. Silas Lapham in his essence is the realization of the merit of the "coat of paint" policy. Put a coat of paint upon despotism and the effect is liberty. Art is a coat of paint upon the hideousness of American life. "I believe in my paint." Silas Lapham is made to say. "I believe it's a blessing to the world." The American attitude

exactly! Lapham's notion that a pig pen covered with paint must be all right is natural enough. Never was there such a painted world as this American world. Pig pens certainly look better after a coat of paint and there wasn't a board fence nor a bridge girder nor the face of a cliff nor a bold prospect in nature without Silas Lapham's advertisement in huge flaming letters. He began life as a bare footed boy, too, without a cent to his name and he is worth a million dollars!

I never rise from a perusal of "The Rise of Silas Lapham," and I have read it many times, without a vivid realization of the inadequacy of the native American head to ideas. Howells in all his books has a tendency to expose our intellectual poverty. In his account of Silas Lapham he renders very obvious the inaccessibility of the native American to what may be called the artistic conduct of life. As I follow the agonies of Silas Lapham at the dinner table of the Coreys I can see why the beauty of our republican institutions is buried

beneath tne growth of legal technicalities, hidden by coat upon coat of the Lapham paint. Our institutions are too beautiful for a people to whom the poetry of politics is meaningless. In any reference to the artistic conduct of life at the Corey table, we find Lapham staring from one to another of the guests, blankly. The attitude he affects to all artists, especially to the artist who built that house for him, is the most American thing in all Howells. I associate it with the shock received by Lemuel Barker at sight of that nude in a Boston park. To Lapham, in fact, as to the native Americans one encounters in the world of Howells generally, there is something meretricious in the whole artistic attitude to life. Art in the native American mind enjoys the dubious importance attached to the devil in the medieval mind. Art may be very well in its way, when subservient to the police, but in its protest against a landscape vivified with Lapham's paint, the thing is an obstacle to legitimate business.

The lesson of Silas Lapham's career, then, is that the native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin are the last survivors of the barbarian world of which the ancient Greeks left us their profound impressions. As I think I said before, the Laphams are haunted by an uneasy suspicion of what they really are—a tribe of savages. Silas Lapham spurns the suggestion with fury and with high words. He's as good as anybody! Silas Lapham!

All native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin are like Silas Lapham. They know how to deal with all the British aristocrats in the peerage. They have been taught how to treat a waiter. They do not know how to deal with an artist. They can make nothing of the artistic attitude to life. For this reason the native American is a bigot, intolerant, disposed to suspect ideas. The fact that artists are the conspicuous victims of native American bigotry—I use the word artist in its true sense—is the reason our country remains a great stronghold of barbarism, despite the

passing of Chingachgook. Silas Lapham is all over the place.

The Silas Lapham of Howells is thus to be regarded as a companion portrait to the Chingachgook of Cooper. They are the two types of savages our country has produced. We have seen the last of the Mohicans, but the native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin are still with us and the contract has been given the place as well as the importance of the tomahawk. The American savage has come in from the wilderness to the board of directors. He has put off his feathers and his paint for a straw hat and a business suit. He has lost the buffalo and the forest primeval but he has got hold of painting and the arts. They flourish with us only when they comply with the standards of Silas Lapham. They are those of Chingachgook—for in all things we are the heirs of the Mohicans, the land of the barbarian. And precisely as Silas Lapham is the reincarnation of Chingachgook, the dominant American is a contemporary version

of Silas Lapham, a noble savage, a fine barbarian, with not a trace of self-consciousness to mar the simplicity of his effect. By liberty, freedom, art, democracy and the like, the American means what Chingachgook meant by such things after they had passed through the crucible of Silas Lapham's mind. Chingachgook streaked his face with the colors he got from the earth. Lapham sold them. That is all. The Howells masterpiece depicts this barbarism.

XIV

THE REVOLTS OF HOWELLS

NOTWITHSTANDING the brilliance of "The Rise of Silas Lapham," there are critics who insist that the masterpiece of Howells is "A Hazard of New Fortunes." I have always considered that story as marking the period of revolt in Howells. He is essentially a rebellious spirit, and by this I mean that in his heart of hearts, the social system under which he lives is not precious. He might be called a parlor socialist by the sarcastic radical youth of the country. The famous "Altruria" sketches belong to this mood. When Howells abandoned Boston and took up editorial and literary work in New York he permitted the mood of revolt to assert itself. He became what was for the time a furious rebel against society. He would in the light of what he wrote then be

deemed a socialist of the conservative type today.

The cause of the revolt of Howells is plain in every chapter of the great tale he based upon social conditions in the metropolis. Liberty has never been respectable. The American people comprise the most respectable nation that has ever existed. Howells discovered to his chagrin that there is an American attitude of condescension to liberty, a distrust of it based upon the history of the French revolution. There are producible instances, indeed, of American citizens who do not feel towards liberty the uneasiness of the lamb at the spectacle of a swooping eagle. Such Americans are not of Anglo-Saxon stock. They are not Americans in the historical sense and they are certainly not Americans in the patriotic sense. So Howells makes his plea (in one of his great novels) for the foreigner. The true American talks of liberty regulated by law. He shudders at law regulated by liberty. He has been reared in the creed that

liberty—the liberty for which the Gracchi perished, the liberty for which Madame Roland went to the guillotine—is bad for a man. The true American loves his country far more than he loves liberty, but he loves respectability far more than he loves either. It is the Anglo-Saxon temperament.

The cleverness with which Howells can bring this out in a novel that includes among its episodes a strike on the grand scale shows him without illusion on the subject of our respectable social system. In the circumstance that liberty is not respectable, we have by no means the sole basis of American dislike of it. There is a subtle connection between liberty and the joy of life. The American, in the Anglo-Saxon sense, has no capacity for emotional or æsthetic expression of the joy of life. His gloom of soul lurks always in his depressingly conventional cheer of manner. The American runs from joy with the same instinct that makes him flee liberty. This is brought out in all the New England novels of Howells.

William Dean Howells

Joy with us is the monopoly of disreputable characters. It finds expression in methods indistinguishable at times from the grossest immorality. That brings the American on the scene with a new Anglo-Saxon law. Liberty is limited still further. For liberty is to the American an object of just such suspicion as filled the mind of Octavia with reference to Cleopatra. Liberty is the laughing lady of too easy virtue whose frenzies are really orgiastic to our national temperament.

The familiarity of Howells with the Latin temperament accounts for this perception of the contrast to it afforded in the Anglo-Saxon nature. He is always in rebellion against something that turns out to be Anglo-Saxon. He is like Dickens in that. But Howells has another title to applause.

He had the courage to fly in the face of American respectability when the Chicago anarchists were executed. I love Howells for that, because nothing so respectable as American government—I speak not of the Tam-

manyized cities—seems ever to have evolved unless we are to take seriously the claims put forth for ancient Egypt. One can pick flaws in the United States government and Howells, who has served it, pokes a little fun at it or allows his characters to do so in more than one novel. There may be lax administration at times or the application of political principle in a bad sense to appointments in the bureaucracy or a certain wild extravagance that most of us ought to condemn but by which we benefit. Granting the worst, however, the respectability of the United States government remains solid and that is what Howells seems to be referring to when he makes a heroine like Helen Harkness discuss democracy with a "lord." The Roman Empire under Trajan cannot compare with the United States government in the matter of respectability and I suppose we could confront the Antonines themselves with our Polk, our Fillmore and our Wilson.

In this solid respectability one finds the ex-

planation of that frigid abstractness which renders the United States government so lunar. It stands in the American consciousness for all that is petrific, remote, aloof. It seems very real on paper and it grows so fantastic when one applies the test of personal contact. A youth in the world of Howells is surprised to learn that he has two Senators. The United States government as Howells deals with it reminds me of Shelley's poetry because it sustains so little relation with reality. I think this is the extent of the sympathy Howells can feel with the position of the rebel against society. He does not complain of the United States government. It mystifies him. All things human are alien to it. What, for example, has the United States government ever done to sweeten manners? The very question is absurd. It reveals a hopeless misunderstanding of the nature of American institutions. A philosophy of this kind runs all through the work of Howells and I have a fancy that his sympathy with the movement to

prevent the execution of the Chicago anarchists was artistic and not at all political. His socialism takes on an artistry of the same school of parlor radicalism.

The great revolt of Howells, then, is from the British literary superstition. His other revolts—even in "A Hazard of New Fortunes"—are temperamental. He did not discover the British literary superstition. He was not the first to preach against it. He is in his great revolt an unconscious follower of Edgar Allan Poe. There is a something like poetic justice to me in the fact that one whom Howells seems so to despise forestalled him in the supreme revolt. It can not be said that the revolt—noticed casually in one of Emerson's journals—ever led to serious results. We still groan beneath the weight of the superstition. Many a year has elapsed since Poe wrote:

> There is not a more disgusting spectacle under the sun than our subserviency to British criticism. It is disgusting, first, because it is truckling, servile, pusillanimous —

secondly, because of its gross irrationality. We know the British to bear us little but ill will; we know that in no case do they utter unbiassed opinions of American books; we know that in the few instances in which our writers have been treated with common decency in England, these writers have either openly paid homage to English institutions, or have had lurking at the bottom of their hearts a secret principle at war with Democracy: we know all this, and yet, day after day, submit our necks to the degrading yoke of the crudest opinion that emanates from the fatherland. Now if we must have nationality, let it be a nationality that will throw off this yoke.

It is to the credit of Howells that he has arrived independently at a conclusion that is on all fours with that of Poe. Howells has seen as no other American has seen since Poe that the literary art of the English in the novel is beneath contempt. So much he was willing to say—in his own fashion, of course—at a time when the avowal required courage.

I do not mean, naturally, that Howells ever pronounced the British novel itself to be beneath contempt. In fact, he has given the novel, as written by the English, great praise,

while noting its tendency to shade off into the romance or rather to emerge from that, or to be a hybrid of the two. He notes with decision that the English in the novel, properly speaking, are not artists although they may be deemed in some instances, at least, masters of the business of telling their tales, of delineating character, of creating humorous effects. Fiction in the British isles remains singularly backward, speaking from the standpoint of the æsthetic. It remains where chemistry was in the eighteenth century.

Here is a passage in which he exposes his creed as a novelist, without, perhaps, realizing it.[1]

Portsmouth still awaits her novelist; he will find a rich field when he comes; and I hope he will come of the right sex, for it needs some minute and subtle feminine skill, like that of Jane Austen, to express a fit sense of its life in the past. Of its life in the present I know nothing. I could only go by those delightful, silent houses, and sigh my longing soul into their dim interiors. When now and then a young shape in summer silk, or a group

[1] "Literature and Life" Studies. By William Dean Howells. New York: Harper & Brothers.

of young shapes in diaphanous muslin, fluttered out of them, I was no wiser; and doubtless my elderly fancy would have been unable to deal with what went on in them. Some girl of those flitting through the warm, odorous twilight must become the creative historian of the place; I can at least imagine a Jane Austen now growing up in Portsmouth.

This is blank realism. All through his criticism—this is very significant—one notes that Howells seems inclined to exempt Jane Austen from his censure of the art of British novelists in general. Jane Austen wins the approval of Howells because her methods are those of the realism he professes.

If she had dealt in adventures of the tremendous kind Howells, I fear, would never have praised her art. The business of the novelist is to reflect what Howells calls life. Now the thing that goes by the name of life to Howells is but a superficial aspect of it.

Howells seems in his criticism to have no suspicion of the melancholy fact that life is preposterous, melodramatic, that it is more romantic than Ariosto's "Orlando." He will

allow no combination of psychological insight with imagination and fancy. I suspect that his reluctance to give Shakespeare his due springs from a dislike of the ghost in "Hamlet." There are no ghosts, no fairies. Howells notes further:

> If Miss Jewett were of a little longer breath than she has yet shown herself in fiction, I might say the Jane Austen of Portsmouth was already with us, and had merely not yet begun to deal with its precious material. . . . One comfortable matron, in a cinnamon silk, was just such a figure as that in the Miss Wilkins's story where the bridegroom fails to come on the wedding-day; but, as I say, they made me think more of Miss Jewett's people. The shore folk and the Down-Easters are specifically hers; and these were just such as might have belonged in "The Country of the Pointed Firs," or "Sister Wisby's Courtship," or "Dulham Ladies," or "An Autumn Ramble," or twenty other entrancing tales.

The words will repay study. They sum up in a brief paragraph the whole Howells gospel. They are like the little piece of butter which the housekeeper tastes out of the tub at market and which, to the discerning, affords a measure of the quality of the whole.

William Dean Howells

Man has done very little as yet but scratch the surface of life. When Howells tells us that the novel should reflect life, it will be found that his context amounts to a definition of life in terms of his own formula. And life, as Leonard Dalton Abbott so often reminds us, is too large for our formulas. Howells does not seem to know this. He is a striking example of the great artist who is not a critic. For example, he tells us in a pontifical tone that if a novel flatters the passions and exalts them above the principles it is poisonous. Poe tells us that the passions should be held in reverence.

If we study the gospel of Jesus Christ, we find passion set above principle. For what is the first and greatest commandment? And what is the commandment that is like unto it? And what says Paul on the subject of the greatest of all the passions? The truth is that passion is divine because it is implanted in the bosom of man by his maker. Principle is the child of the intellectual pride of man.

No Critic

The fact that passion has been perverted to base uses is beside the point. Principle has been abused, misapplied, misdirected. To the artist there are not many passions.

There exists to the artist a solitary passion. Truth. Beauty! Give it what name you will and thrill to the thing.

Apart from the great thing in the world of creative imagination, we find Howells inadequate in some of the little things. Thus, his criticism of one of the conspicuous characteristics of Anthony Trollope in the novel reveals a positively English lack of insight. Trollope, as all experienced readers of good novels are well aware, establishes himself on terms of unusual familiarity with them. A direct touch with his readers is the consequence. It is a most unusual thing for a novelist to make a personal appeal to his readers on behalf of his heroine. Trollope does this with a wonderful effect in "The Warden," for instance, when his Eleanor Harding gets up that plan to meet John Bold:

Girls below twenty and old ladies above sixty will do her justice; for in the female heart the soft springs of sweet romance reopen after many years, and again gush out with waters pure as in earlier days, and greatly refresh the path that leads downwards to the grave. But I fear that the majority of those between these two eras will not approve of Eleanor's plan. I fear that unmarried ladies of thirty-five will declare that there can be no probability of so absurd a project being carried through; that young women on their knees before their lovers are sure to get kissed, and that they would not put themselves in such a position did they not expect it; that Eleanor is going to Bold, only because circumstances prevent Bold from coming to her; that she is certainly a little fool, or a little schemer, but that in all probability she is thinking a good deal more about herself than her father.

Dear ladies, you are right as to your appreciation of the circumstances, but very wrong as to Miss Harding's character. Miss Harding was much younger than you are, and could not, therefore, know, as you may do, to what dangers such an encounter might expose her. She may get kissed; I think it very probable that she will; but I give my solemn word and positive assurance, that the remotest idea of such a catastrophe never occurred to her, as she made the great resolve now alluded to.

This is altogether charming. Only a Philistine could object to the manner. The device is essential to the somewhat sophisticated

method of Trollope in his studies of the relations of men and women. It is a method that destroys no illusion because Trollope seeks the creation of no illusion as that term is employed by novelists and their critics. Since Trollope is a searcher of hearts, a student of character, a dealer, if the thing may thus be stated, in hearts that know, it follows that he assumes a kind of sophistication in his reader.

Only a mind of a certain maturity, not necessarily of years but of tone, would understand the characteristic novel of Trollope at all. Here and there an English critic, lacking all insight, tells us that Trollope comes from behind the scenes to mingle with his characters.

Trollope never mingles with his characters. He talks very directly to his readers about those characters. He has a perfect right to this method. It is a convention of his art. All this Howells completely overlooks in his denunciation of this aspect of Trollope's work. Trollope, we must remember, is a great novel-

ist although not a great artist as well, like Howells.

Nevertheless, in one of his masterpieces, we have Howells actually introducing his own name in his own capacity as a novelist! Molière set him the example. This is a greater sin to me than all the offenses of Trollope in "intruding" upon his reader. Trollope, in "Barchester Towers," makes this apology for himself, an apology and a confession to be pondered by all students of the art of fiction:

> How often does the novelist feel, aye, and the historian also and the biographer, that he has conceived within his mind and accurately depicted on the tablet of his brain the full character and personage of a man, and that nevertheless, when he flies to pen and ink to perpetuate the portrait, his words forsake, elude, disappoint, and play the deuce with him, till at the end of a dozen pages the man described has no more resemblance to the man conceived than the sign-board at the corner of the street has to the Duke of Cambridge?
>
> And yet such mechanical descriptive skill would hardly give more satisfaction to the reader than the skill of the photographer does to the anxious mother desirous to possess an absolute duplicate of her beloved child. The likeness is indeed true; but it is a dull, dead, unfeeling,

inauspicious likeness. The face is indeed there, and those looking at it will know at once whose image it is; but the owner of the face will not be proud of the resemblance.

There is no royal road to learning; no short cut to the acquirement of any valuable art. Let photographers and daguerreotypers do what they will, and improve as they may with further skill on that which skill has already done, they will never achieve a portrait of the human face divine. Let biographers, novelists, and the rest of us groan as we may under the burdens which we so often feel too heavy for our shoulders, we must either bear them up like men, or own ourselves too weak for the work we have undertaken. There is no way of writing well and also of writing easily.

XV

THE "SISSY" SCHOOL OF LITERATURE

THE most disconcerting of all the disconcerting aspects of Howells as a critic is his attitude to those Russians. In literature the Russians have produced no artist of the first rank. Their novelists are often psychologists of extraordinary power. I suppose Tolstoy is one of the greatest writers that ever lived. But a supreme artist in the novel?

No!

Turgenieff is an artist. Dostoievsky is in the main unreadable. The Russians have done well in the short story, better than the English, which is not saying much, but not on the whole, I think, as well as ourselves. I am speaking of Russian literature only as I find it in translations. In throwing the weight of his influence on the side of the "supreme

greatness" theory of his favorite Russian authors Howells has but added to the numbers of our literary superstitions.

The escapades of Howells as a critic of Spanish fiction have proved harmless. He has paraded some two or three clever writers as if they were as great as himself. Those Spaniards of his are on a level with the weakest of his Russians.

The really mischievous work of Howells as a critic of literature, however, has been done to the literature of his native land. Much as I respect him for his long and gallant war upon the British literary superstition, he has fastened upon us an American literary superstition that is almost as absurd. In an elucidation of this point, I must use a word not often employed by the critic of literature.

That word is sissy.

"Sissy," is not defined in the average dictionary. It is a somewhat slangy term, handed down from one generation of schoolboys to the next. A boy who was called a

sissy was supposed to excel in feminine traits rather than in masculine traits. A sissy, as his playmates often admit, will be the clever boy of his class, gifted. Howells is at the head of the sissy school of American literature. This school, for commercial reasons, is the dominant one.

Howells is the head of the school, its star, its blazing genius. The American writers who seem the objects of his particular enthusiasm are old maids, or wives who have the characteristics of old maids, or men who are sissies. The sissy attitude to literature is reflected in all the criticism of Howells. It is implicit in his fiction, but there it lends itself completely to his artistic effect. That effect is dependent upon the subtleties of the feminine mind, the crises in the feminine heart. What particularly strikes us in the world of Howells is the subordination of all that is masculine to all that is feminine. Even Silas Lapham is subdued into the tone of his wife and daughters, who make the supreme decisions in everything.

This saturation of the Howells atmosphere with woman explains the fact that all the point of his tale escapes at times the masculine mind. It has been said by some very observing person or other whose name I do not know that women make up a secret society to which the men are not admitted. Howells seems in some way or other to have gained admittance to this secret society. The most inconspicuous of woman's tricks, even the side-long glance she bestows upon her attire in certain critical emergencies, is well known to him. Only a novelist who had studied the behavior of women carefully could enter into details like these regarding the Lapham sisters. I quote from "The Rise of Silas Lapham" in *The Riverside Literature Series,* of the Houghton Mifflin Company:

> They were not girls who embroidered or abandoned themselves to needle-work. Irene spent her abundant leisure in shopping for herself and her mother, of whom both daughters made a kind of idol, buying her caps and laces out of their pin-money, and getting her dresses far beyond her capacity to wear. Irene dressed herself very

stylishly, and spent hours on her toilet every day. Her sister had a simpler taste, and, if she had done altogether as she liked, might even have slighted dress. They all three took long naps every day, and sat hours together minutely discussing what they saw out of the window. In her self-guided search for self-improvement, the elder sister went to many church lectures on a vast variety of secular subjects, and usually came home with a comic account of them, and that made more matter of talk for the whole family. She could make fun of nearly everything; Irene complained that she scared away the young men whom they got acquainted with at the dancing-school sociables. They were, perhaps, not the wisest young men.

The girls had learned to dance at Papanti's; but they had not belonged to the private classes. They did not even know of them, and a great gulf divided them from those who did. Their father did not like company, except such as came informally in their way; and their mother had remained too rustic to know how to attract it in the sophisticated city fashion. None of them had grasped the idea of European travel; but they had gone about to mountain and sea-side resorts, the mother and the two girls, where they witnessed the spectacle which such resorts present throughout New England, of multitudes of girls, lovely, accomplished, exquisitely dressed, humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young man; but the Laphams had no skill or courage to make themselves noticed, far less courted by the solitary invalid, or clergyman, or artist. They lurked helplessly about in

the hotel parlors, looking on and not knowing how to put themselves forward.

Indeed, were it not for this intimacy with the soul and the circumstance of women, Howells could not have written his masterpieces. The American world is the feminized world and the reign of Howells is the expression of that fact in our literature. Woman regards man as an instrument in her own hands. Whatever he does that is noble or great, she inspired. Howells is inclined to jest at this feminine egoism. Nevertheless, he has done more to promote it than any other American writer who has worked since the civil war.

There is little evidence in the works of Howells that he realizes the masculine attitude to life at all. This by no means implies a disparagement of his genius. It illustrates the well known fact that nothing is more surprising than the limitations of men of genius. Consider, for instance, the incapacity of Shakespeare to reflect anything but a hostile attitude to democracy, or the failure of Shelley

to discern the spirituality of Jesus, or the lack of intuition in Dickens as he explores the heart of woman.

The inadequacy of Howells to the male factor in human experience is only additional evidence that the limitations of men of genius are no less surprising than their gifts. Unless we perceive clearly the reasons which have raised Howells to sovereignty over the sissy school of literature, the dominant American one, we shall miss the point of his distinction between the romanticist and the realist. His whole career is founded upon the novel as he understands it in a sense differentiated from the romance and from the "romanticistic."

As Howells proceeds to explain himself in his critical work, we observe that the realism he champions amounts to nothing more than a feminine attitude to life on the part of the novelist, an attitude of receptivity, of passivity, the woman attitude. This is by no means a wrong attitude but it is feminine. The novelist whose genius happens to be masculine will

never submit to the trammels of such a female conception of his function. He will inevitably stamp himself upon the wax of life in patterns of his own temperament, his own soul, his own conception of the thing called human experience. He will not be content with observation of life and the faithful reflection of what he sees.

When a masculine genius in fiction has dealt with life it is in some degree made over. When the feminine genius is done with his work, life may be better reflected, but it remains exactly what it was.

The Howells war on romanticism works out, then, into a protest against the masculine in literature. The praises of Howells are reserved for Jane Austen, the essentially feminine novelist, whom he places above George Eliot, who manifests a masculine genius, above Charlotte Brontë, who could write a man's tale, and above Dickens, most masculine of novelists. In American literature, the praises of Howells are all for the ladies and for those

who write like ladies. To those who have no realization of Woman, the tales of Howells seem often trivial but he is trivial only as a critic. I had almost said he is no critic. But he is a real critic now and then.

It is important to distinguish at all times between a real critic and a sham critic—the critic who may be an unconscious humbug as well as a conscious one. No man becomes an expert on the subject of literature from the mere fact of having read many books. A man may have read but few books, yet if he bring to those few the right qualities, and if he study those few much, he is an expert in literature of a kind. An expert in literature is not necessarily a critic.

Experts in literature are exempt from the rule denying a man the title of critic if he have done no important creative work of his own. Thus a man may be an expert on the subject of Shakespeare, making brilliant conjectural emendations of the text, and yet be incapable

of Shakespearean criticism in the true sense. Such a man is Doctor Dryasdust.

Doctor Dryasdust is invariably a conscientious expert in the department of literature to which he happens to consecrate himself. He usually gives himself out as a critic. He is taken quite seriously in that capacity throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, which is the paradise of Doctor Dryasdust.

A simple rule enables the uninitiated to distinguish the few who are critics from the many who are Doctor Dryasdusts. That pompous man holding a chair of literature at the university, writing heavy introductions to light authors and read widely is Doctor Dryasdust. That shabby man whose idea of a novel or a poem thrilled you and of whom Doctor Dryasdust, when you asked him, remarked with a burst of laughter: "Oh, nobody takes him seriously!"—that shabby man is a critic.

Let us look more closely into this subject of the critic, of criticism. Wordsworth in his

old age advised Robert Montgomery not to be anxious about any individual's opinions concerning his writings, however highly he might think of his genius or rate his judgment.

Be a severe critic to yourself, said Wordsworth, and depend upon it no person's decision upon the merit of your works will bear comparison, in point of value, with your own. Above all, said Wordsworth to his young friend, he must remind him that no man takes the trouble of surveying and pondering another's writings with a hundredth part of the care which an author of sense and genius will have bestowed upon his own.

Many a year has come and gone since Wordsworth said these things, and I do not see that time has given them the lie. No criticism of any kind is published anywhere in the Anglo-Saxon world that is of much use to a writer, although it is often of great interest and importance to a reader. Things are not quite so bad among the French, to whom the writing of prose is one of the arts, to whom it

is possible to draw a distinction between the thing a writer says and his manner of saying it.

This a vital point.

What a writer says is one thing.

The way in which he says it is quite another.

The moment this distinction is apprehended, a great step forward has been taken in the field of literary criticism. Most people think they can take this forward leap. The matter is far from being as simple as all that. Many men, and still more women, who make great claims for themselves as critics, can not take this step at all. Submit to their judgment any specimen of prose or verse in manuscript, of which they do not know the authorship, and the verdict will be based upon all sorts of irrelevant considerations. Bottom, the weaver, can see no beauty in any sonnet that discredits the practice of roaring. Perfect as may be the poet's mastery of the form, beautiful as may be the metaphor that brings the idea home to us, exquisite as may be the negotiation of

the difficulty between octave and sextette, glorious as may be the climax of the last line, Bottom, the weaver, will insist in good faith that no sonnet in disparagement of roaring can possibly be great. It is but placing oneself more hopelessly in the power of Bottom to point out to him that his attitude to the sonnet as literature merely reflects his view of the roar as a universal standard. He will retort that the world is but a place to roar in, that the arts are languages, and all those languages are nothing but roaring.

In the same way and for the same reason, it is fatuous to submit to a true Methodist a tale that suggests a doubt, however prettily, regarding the goodness of God, because a true Methodist is convinced that in these days of quadrennial conferences no doubt can be thrown on the goodness of God prettily. Nor would it be obvious to a Christian Scientist that any great literature can grow around the amours of Mary Baker G. Eddy. No true Catholic detects literary values in the epic

which does not, in any reference to the Virgin Mary, accept her immaculate conception.

I have lingered over this detail in order to clarify the supreme mystery connected with any application of the critical faculty to literature. He only is a critic who can divest his mind of every consideration irrelevant to a test of literature. Is it literature? That is the question confronting a critic when, in the discharge of his function, he studies anything in the form of prose or verse. The answer to this question has nothing to do with any doubt that may be cast by a writer upon such themes as the goodness of God or the fallacy of roaring. The mere fact that a man is in the habit of judging prose or verse from the standpoint of such irrelevancies will in time disqualify him as a critic of literature.

In this simple fact we are afforded a sufficient explanation of a circumstance that mystifies the young and inexperienced writer. I refer to the incapacity of the editor of almost any great periodical in the land to pass judg-

ment upon any prose or verse submitted to him —I mean from the standpoint of literature. The editor will tell you quickly enough and with an unerring judgment whether or not a bit of prose fits into his editorial scheme. This inveterate habit of judging all prose and all verse in the light of his formula ultimately destroys an editor's capacity to judge either prose or verse as literature. The necessities of his position compel him to subordinate the literature to the formula. Howells as an editor was the worst offender.

Even when an editor—it sometimes happens —decides to make room for literature, it is not so easy to find a critic. It seems the easiest thing in the world to be a critic of literature—just as it seems the easiest thing in the world to be a democrat or to reveal a sense of humor. There is a theory that the critic is a person who has failed in literature. In view of the numbers of persons who are understood to have failed in literature, it seems odd that the critic remains so rare a bird. I am personally

acquainted with persons who, having failed as critics, have succeeded in literature. He who has never scoured New York for a critic only to return with a college graduate, will never understand why periodicals are edited according to formulas. A formula saves an editor from any need to reveal his ignorance regarding the true answer to many riddles. What is style? How does a poet reveal genius in his work as distinguished from mere talent? What is an original idea, and is its value, in literature, equal to that of the hackneyed theme touched by a master? Dialogue again! And fidelity to nature, and knowledge of the human heart—who is competent to decide that a writer has or has not these things? Any college graduate can sit at a desk and run a periodical according to a formula beautifully. To get rid of the formula, to inspire men to write out their highest and holiest, to give them the precious sense of being understood, to be able to make allowance for the weaknesses as well as the sublimities of the literary temper-

ament, to do these things with such effect that a periodical will be literary and American and profitable—I have met college graduates who could not do these things. I fear that as an editor Howells neglected these things. He says he essayed these things.

Literature, then, is purely incidental to the editorial policy of our periodicals. It is not, as a rule, believed in. It is judged, not from its own standpoint, but with reference to factors that are not literary at all. And taking our great periodicals together, I am sure that during the long period since our Civil War they have, on the whole, done more for British authors than they have done for American authors.

To this rule of subservience to the British literary superstition, William Dean Howells is the honorable exception. He has created the "sissy" school—native American and Anglo-Saxon to the backbone. It is the school, if one may say so, of insipidity. It

tests everything in the light of its formula. Note how cleverly Howells evades the point—unconsciously, perhaps—in this remark which I extract from the volume called "Literature and Life." The sophisticated editor is giving advice to the young contributor:

Unless you are sensible of some strong frame within your work, something vertebral, it is best to renounce it, and attempt something else in which you can feel it. If you are secure of the frame you must observe the quality and character of everything you build about it; you must touch, you must almost taste, you must certainly test, every material you employ; every bit of decoration must undergo the same scrutiny as the structure.

It will be some vague perception of the want of this vigilance in the young contributor's work which causes the editor to return it to him for revision, with those suggestions which he will do well to make the most of; for when the editor once finds a contributor he can trust, he rejoices in him with a fondness which the contributor will never perhaps understand.

It will not do to write for the editor alone; the wise editor understands this, and averts his countenance from the contributor who writes at him; but if he feels that the contributor conceives the situation, and will conform to the conditions which his periodical has invented for

itself, and will transgress none of its unwritten laws; if he perceives that he has put artistic conscience in every general and detail, and though he has not done the best, has done the best that he can do, he will begin to liberate him from every trammel except those he must wear himself, and will be only too glad to leave him free. He understands, if he is at all fit for his place, that a writer can do well only what he likes to do, and his wish is to leave him to himself as soon as possible.

That is to say, the young contributor must stick to the formula of the sissy school. Every time Howells praises a writer, he turns out to be a member of the sissy school. For instance, in the volume from which I have just quoted, we have the author of "The Rise of Silas Lapham" saying:

I do not believe that in my editorial service on the *Atlantic Monthly*, which lasted fifteen years in all, I forgot the name or the characteristic quality, or even the handwriting, of a contributor who had pleased me, and I forgot thousands who did not. I never lost faith in a contributor who had done a good thing; to the end I expected another good thing from him. I think I was always at least as patient with him as he was with me, though he may not have known it.

At the time I was connected with that periodical it

had almost a monopoly of the work of Longfellow, Emerson, Holmes, Lowell, Whittier, Mrs. Stowe, Parkman, Higginson, Aldrich, Stedman, and many others not so well known, but still well known. These distinguished writers were frequent contributors, and they could be counted upon to respond to almost any appeal of the magazine; yet the constant effort of the editors was to discover new talent, and their wish was to welcome it.

In other words, the constant effort of Howells was to get hold of more sissies, lest the great school should perish. It has not perished. That is the scourge of our literature to-day. Our successful writers are all young ladies—some of them in trousers, and some of them very, very mature.

Few surprises are more overwhelming to young ladies who think—there are some—than that occasioned by the grossness, the coarseness, the vulgarity, the brutality of the real writer. Indeed, many young ladies belonging to our best families have no suspicion that the sleek, well groomed men infesting the editorial departments of New York period-

icals, talking glibly of style, picking flaws in hexameters and affecting a British accent are not in the least "literary."

Literature can, no doubt, be cultivated in palaces, under domes, amid pomps, but it cannot be created there. Great literature is the creation, for the most part, of disreputable characters, many of whom looked rather seedy, some of whom were drunken blackguards, a few of whom were swindlers or perpetual borrowers, rowdies, gamblers or slaves to a drug. We may rest assured that the haughty editor of the great New York periodical, swaggering across Fifth Avenue for his cocktail and cold turkey, would never condescend to nod to such a shabby object as wrote "The Raven."

The result of this state of affairs is the renascence of insipidity in Anglo-Saxon literature. There has been nothing like it since the age of Pope. The fault now is in kind what it was then. Literature has too many friends at court. Literature has too many silk breeches. There are too many fine gentlemen

in literature. Too many universities are devoted to it.

It is the consequence of the triumph of that sissy school of which Howells is the prophet.

XVI

THE LIMITATIONS OF HOWELLS

THE most obvious characteristic of the work of Howells, beginning with the book which seems to have established his fame, "Their Wedding Journey," to that study of religious experience called "The Leatherwood God," is its relation to the surface of life and to that surface only. His novels, his novelettes, his experiments with the short story, his farces, his criticisms never take us to the depths of anything. There are, he seems to say again and again, no depths. Life is a surface. It is to be examined with minutest care, made the subject of a series of such careful studies as have proceeded from his pen, and of which "The Quality of Mercy," if not the most successful from a reader's standpoint, is at any rate a wonderful instance of the method.

Her Soul

Even when dealing with the supernatural, as in "The Undiscovered Country," or "The Leatherwood God," Howells never plunges into depths. He is like those older psychologists who kept so carefully within the limits of consciousness that they never suspected the existence of the sub-conscious. The matter might be put in a different fashion by noting that the genius of Howells is objective and not in the least subjective. He can tell us with subtle observation what Grace Breen said when she confessed her love, how she looked, the way she raised her arms and what she wore. He never dares to say what went on within her soul. How could he ever know the sub-conscious? In avoiding all that he avoids likewise the symptoms or the depths of passion, its essence, as the poets might say.

There are critics who deny that any novelist can tell what transpires within the soul of his heroine. That is not the teaching of psychology. Indeed, nothing is so remarkable as the discredit attaching to the whole realistic theory

of fiction exemplified in the work of Howells and his disciples in consequence of the revelations of psychoanalysis. The Freudian theory of the neuroses vindicates the practice of the older novelists who explained even the dreams of their heroines. Shakespeare, the greatest of all creators of heroines, of all students of the passions, is at the same time in his exploration of the human, the antithesis to Howells and to the American school of realism. The great literary artist is he who plunges boldly into the subconsciousness of his heroine after the manner of Freud with the typical dream of the so-called "Œdipus complex." To tell the truth, it is impossible to read the literature of the psychoanalytic school of Freudian psychology without marvelling at the completeness with which the whole fabric of the Howells criticism collapses and disintegrates. It is all surface and no depth.

Howells, then, has done an enormous amount of damage to American literature. He was enabled to do all the mischief through

the medium of his own amazing genius in technique, his own perfect humor, his mastery of dialogue, his ability to reflect the lives of the native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin. These people have never explored life subjectively. The American subconsciousness is to all intents and purposes a sealed book. The poverty of the American Anglo-Saxon mind consists in this very superficiality, this strict adherence to the surface of life. It is a limitation, taken over with some things that are good, like the writ of habeas corpus and the principle of representative government, from the British. Charles Dickens, for instance, is a realist of sorts, and if he lacks the artistry of Howells, he is for all that a genius of the highest order whose characters have no souls in any psychological sense of the term. He, too, never suspected the subconscious mind as Shakespeare read it in Lady Macbeth.

The practical result of the triumph of the art of Howells in fiction has been to render dominant a school of American writers who

may be described as reporters of the surface of things. Howells is a reporter—a reporter of genius, to repeat, a humorist of the rarest gifts, an artist with words, but still a reporter. His followers are reporters. The writers of our day are reporters when they deal in the thing they call fiction. That is why we have men and women who get us nowhere although they write amazing short stories of New England country life, amazingly photographic realizations of the countenances of the New England woman, her peculiarities of vocabulary, her remarks on the weather, her drolleries. Other "masters" of this Howells school devote themselves to a minute study of the natives of our middle west. They transcribe the scenery of the region. They reproduce the industrial conditions with loving fidelity. The mountaineers of Tennessee, the working people of Rhode Island, the men of the great plains across which the cowboy once galloped emerge in the novels of the realistic school—I do not affect to employ the lingo of

these people quite as they affect to employ it themselves—with quaintness, startlingly or dramatically.

The difficulty with it all remains the one that limited Charles de Bernard when he essayed to write like Balzac. "Gerfaut" is the best novel of the school founded upon the methods of Balzac. No doubt it would be easy enough to name the best novel written by the followers of Howells. Nevertheless, a school runs the risk of producing but one master—its founder. There is but one Balzac. There is but one William Dean Howells. He seems certain that his methods are alone legitimate, as may be noted from his remarks regarding Charles Reade in "My Literary Passions." Naturally, if fiction is to be regarded as reporting with genius, Howells is one of the masters of the art of fiction. That is the way the formulas of a master are apt to work out in practice. He lays down the law with authority. And what is the law? The way to do a thing is the master's way.

William Dean Howells

Edgar Allan Poe has to be dismissed with abruptness as an incompetent and Howells achieves even that with pontifical fidelity to dogma. William Dean Howells is, therefore, worthless as a critic unless he is telling us, with quite unconscious egotism, how he does things himself. Young writers who do their work according to the Howells formulas have promise. This explains his numerous "discoveries." The second rate qualities of the writers of our time whom Mr. Howells has praised are easily accounted for. His influence upon the "great" New York periodicals, consciously exercised perhaps or unconsciously endured, as the case may be, has sacrificed the vigor of our literature to mere prettiness. He, more than any other one writer, has rendered contemporary American literature a thin syrup, perfumed to a feminized taste. There is nothing in the form of a man's meal in the literary feasts spread by the Howells school of writers. These men and these women would not allow themselves to be referred to as a

Howells school. They comprise in truth nothing else.

This point may be more adequately stated by borrowing an illustration from the field of science. There are two methods of adding to the accumulated stores of scientific knowledge. We have, for instance, the competent and conscientious observer of facts in the department of botany or of biology. Observations extend over a series of years. Specialists of rare endowments might make these observations to infinity. The results would be of the deepest interest and importance. Nevertheless, the advance in scientific knowledge would prove inconsiderable until the genius appeared who could base a luminous generalization upon the mass of all this data. The generalization knits the facts together but it does more than that. It points the way to fresh discovery. This is the explanation of the greatness of, say, Alfred Russel Wallace. That evolutionist spent a comparatively small amount of his time in the accumulation of his

facts and specimens. It was the generalization he based upon them that revolutionized our way of looking at the history of the world of zoölogy and indicated a path to the revelation of the mystery of life in an organism. The laboratories are full of students who can observe minutely and report with accuracy. The man who frames the luminous generalization is rare indeed.

In precisely the same way, the Howells school of American writers is crowded with men and women who study local color, who report the eccentric behavior of some rural swain, who give us dialogue that arrests and who crowd the canvas with sweet girls. The result is very interesting, very charming. It gets us nowhere. We are brought no nearer the heart of life's mystery by all these novels and tales and short stories of the Jews of the New York East Side or the solid business men of Chicago. We discover nothing about life. There is no great interpretation of it. We do not rise from the perusal of all these minute

transcriptions with a sense of anything but the cleverness of the writer. That is always more or less obvious. The narrative art is invariably caught from Howells. Our young writers may be unaware of their debt to the author of "The Kentons," but the simple truth is that the supple, smooth, delicate narrative art of our time and country was caught from Howells and from him alone. In his hands, in his prime, the style was a revelation but it must be conceded that nowadays the manner—unless he be writing—grows somewhat fatiguing.

I think, therefore, that in his great work as a writer of fiction and in his inadequacy as a critic of it, Howells reveals himself as essentially a native American of Anglo-Saxon origin. I cannot perceive a touch of the Kelt in his genius at all, however the thing may be in his blood. When I say of Howells that he is a native American of Anglo-Saxon origin I mean merely that in his fiction and in his criticism his attitude is intolerant. He is a bigot

William Dean Howells

—a genial, noble bigot with all the charm so often displayed by that type. He has bred a tribe of bigots who write preposterous and impossible novels of the most careful accuracy of observation and of stenographic fidelity in the matter of dialogue and of a most outrageous snobbishness in dealing with the poor. Poverty in an American novel of the Howells type is dealt with from the standpoint of the comic. This is one defect of the method. There must be no sympathy of insight but a series of clever impressions from that reporter's note book. Here we have the source of the mystification attending all this—the genius with which it is done. The amazing thing about Howells is the perfect style in which his ignorance of the nature of literature in relation to life is embodied. No man ever wrote out his own vacuity with more beauty of manner.

The "guide book" quality in so many of the stories of Howells is a consequence of this manner and this method. Chapter after

chapter in "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is a manual of the etiquette of the period. Passage after passage in "The Minister's Charge" is a study of the police system of Boston in its relation to a particular neighborhood. It is interesting to notice how brilliant a Howells novel is when he happens to be dealing with neighborhoods and types that can be made the subject of detailed first hand investigation in the manner of a pawnbroker going over an article upon which he contemplates a loan, or, let us say, of an entomologist looking at a bee or an ant under glass. When, however, Howells is transferred to an environment he has had no opportunity to study or into an atmosphere he does not habitually breathe, he seems lost, unable to cope with the material. The explanation is that topography, objects, material items, are his all in all. He does not get below these physical manifestations of life to the life itself, the essence, the soul. Hence his tales of Italian places and people, based upon his personal and first hand acquaintance

with the land, are better than his tales of New York. He conveys the effect of not knowing New York, of not being steeped in its atmosphere. New York is human, throbbing, freed from the domination of the native American of Anglo-Saxon origin, whose idea of a tale of the great city takes the form of descriptions of Madison Square on a cool morning, let us say, enriched by the quaint costumes of some loafers on a bench and the uncouth witticisms they exchange when the heroine passed delicately by.

Howells, then, is great when he is dealing in the trivial and trivial when he encounters the great. Love such as Clarissa Harlowe knew, fondness like that of Goriot, passion like that inspired by Valerie Marneffe, womanhood even in its less inspired glory as revealed in the Lydia Gwilt of Wilkie Collins, for instance—these are beyond Howells precisely because they are beyond his countrymen in the racial sense. The Anglo-Saxon world is a surface world, a region of property and insti-

tutions, of forms and social conventions, of legal technicalities. In terms of the Freudian psychology, it is a world of "repression" in which nothing is ever permitted to emerge except "symbols," as the experts in this line say. His tales of New York life are, on the whole, unsatisfactory because New York life does not lend itself to his theory of his art. It does not lend itself to treatment after the manner of the dominant American school of writers, the purveyors of stories about nothing in particular told with exquisite technique. Howells is, of course, much greater than his school. No member of it has produced, for example, a volume equal to "A Boy's Town," one of the representative emanations of the mind of Howells.

The most disconcerting experience of all awaits us when we set foot upon the solid rock of the Howells world. It crumbles beneath our feet. His realism is without reality. His waking state is a dream. His characters are ghosts. To comprehend this more fully,

we must realize that precisely as in the realm of the mental, the psychological, the subconscious is seen to be the key to the conscious state, so in the material world its meaning resides in the spiritual fact that underlies it. The thing we call life is a curtain. The lesson we get from Howells seems to be that we must wait for the hand of death to lift the curtain. He would not see in the thing we call life a curtain at all or rather he would use the term as a sort of poetical figure, an illustration. The poetry of Howells, such as it is, reflects this attitude of his. Never was there such realism—in the Howells sense—in rhyme, such sophistication in the Boston sense. It has no spirituality except that of the hard and cold intelligence. It is based upon sense perception, human experience.

Sense perception is the foundation of the art of Howells. He deals in what can be seen, handled and touched mortally. Now, nothing is more surely established by the experience of mankind than the unreality of the purely

objective and material manifestations of what we call the world. That is the lesson of "Hamlet." The world as we know it is a series of symbols. It has a meaning beyond the appearance of things. The physicist expresses this truth by an argument to suggest that all matter is a form of electrical energy. The expert in radioactivity may be wrong in hinting that all the elements are stages of one another, that there is taking place a transmutation like that of which the alchemists dreamed. Still, he is getting at the soul of his subject. The physician denies that disease is anything but a relation of one organism to another. It is not an entity, an independent existence. Here, again, we are getting to the soul of the subject. It would be easy to run through all departments of human activity and find realism, the Howells philosophy, a dethroned monarch of the mind. The whole of science seems to have been captured by the romanticists. It is the romanticists who make all the luminous generalizations. They frame

the bold speculations with the aid of the scientific imagination. Claude Bernard, for instance, is to pathology what Edgar Allan Poe is in literature. The realistic methods of a Howells, applied to chemistry, would have made that science sterile. Not the careful accumulation of facts, important as that may be, but the elucidation of the facts through the boldest possible use of the imagination, the fancy, the psychological insight, will yield the soul of truth.

Especially mischievous has been the influence of Howells upon the short story, the literary form which owes so much to the genius he belittles, Edgar Allan Poe.

The short stories glorified in the criticism of William Dean Howells amount to nothing but monographs upon the behavior of New England organisms. As such they have a certain interest but they are of infinitely less importance than are those monographs upon the behavior of the lower organisms which emerge from time to time in the form of bio-

logical bulletins issued by some laboratory or other. The short stories in question are written with infinite art. They are too often servile imitations of the Howells manner. They go into the details of the domestic economy of a New England spinster, revealing her as a picker of currants in a back garden, let us say, and as a jilt because she preferred to die an old maid. There has ensued at the instigation of Howells an enormous multiplicaiton of this type of short story, emanating as a rule from the pens of women who create ridiculous reputations for themselves because they give us "types." What we want is a short story that will not be merely a well written monograph according to the Howells formula. We want something in the form of a short story that comes to grips with the ultimate, a look behind this curtain. Hence the art of Howells is barren. It is great art, but it is art and nothing more. It is not truth in the large but an accumulation of little truths exquisitely arranged. His

creative work suggests those rooms filled with bric-a-brac of which he makes such unsparing fun. Howells teaches us how to conduct ourselves in the presence of ladies and gentlemen who are native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin. He essays to do more than this. He has tried in some of his later studies of New York to assume a parlor Socialism of a feminine kind but it is a display of ineffectuality. He gives the effect of a man throwing beans at the pillars of society. His thinking on social subjects is well fitted for the kind of minds his heroines have—his Lydia Bloods and his Marcia Hubbards and his Irene Laphams and his Annie Kilburns. He has no large grasp of anything. He does not think. He merely observes and jots down impressions. He has not contributed a solitary generalization of a luminous kind—even erroneous—to literary criticism in all the years of his reign over the native American school of Anglo-Saxon realism. Howells will never be superseded because there is nothing about him

to supersede. He has not made anything original even in the way of a mistake. He is like his whole school in assuming that whatever he can not do is necessarily the wrong thing to do. A great deal of what goes by the name of literary criticism amounts to no more than the condemnation by a master in one creative field of the products of the master in another field. The writer who can not use his imagination warns us with a sneer against the imaginative school. He can not do the work of Poe. Therefore the methods and the criticism of Poe are "worthless." Howells has the fatuity to talk like that.

The ostentatious fashion in which the native American school of dominant Anglo-Saxon writers of the Howells breed has turned its back upon Poe is about to be avenged. The imbecility of the criticism of Poe by this school is sufficiently proved by the latest discoveries in psychoanalysis. Death is revealed in the Freudian psychology as a symbol of sex. We know now, for example, what the imbecility of

the Anglo-Saxons like Stedman missed altogether. The "symbolism" that caused Poe to suggest the idea of death was his mode of reference to an ecstasy of love realized through the instrumentality of the physical organism as the soul emerged upon a spiritual plane. This revelation is but one among many due to that very investigation of the subconscious which so discredits the whole Howells school of realism. The "school" insists that Poe never dealt in sex. Thus, Edmund Clarence Stedman makes a mad remark on the subject of Poe: "There is not an unchaste suggestion in the whole course of his writings." The truth is that of all the poets who have used the English tongue Poe is the most erotic. This real truth about him has been obscured by the imbecility of Anglo-Saxon criticism. It is rudely Philistine to blink the eroticism of Poe any longer, however well established be the convention of his chastity.

Perfect artist that he is, Poe insinuates the

sorcery of sex with refinement, subtly. Never will he shock us vulgarly with what is coarse. His manner is that of those sanctified and pious bawds against whom Polonius warned Ophelia. Take Poe in his characteristically voluptuous mood:

O lady bright! can it be right,
This window open to the night?
The wanton airs, from the tree-top,
Laughingly through the lattice drop;
The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
Flit through thy chamber in and out,
And wave the curtain canopy
So fitfully, so fearfully,
Above the closed and fringéd lid
'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
That, o'er the floor and down the wall
Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall.
O lady dear, hast thou no fear?

How exquisite! And how erotically the poet gloats as he stands "beneath the mystic moon"!

No one who comprehends Poe need now be told that the lady turns out to be a corpse. Only through the medium of death dare the

poet attain the climax of his orgiastic frenzy. Once, taken off his guard, he confesses:

> these roses
> That gave out, in return for the love-light,
> Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death.

Poe is so highly erotic that he cannot, indeed, bring even the moon into his verse without casting a doubt upon her established reputation for chastity. This he will not do chivalrously. He proclaims her burning consciousness of the guiltiest kind of passion:

> Tottering above
> In her highest noon,
> The enamored moon
> Blushes with love!

If this be deemed a forcing of the point, be it noted that the poem from which it has come glorifies an angel out of the Koran. Poe's paradise is the sensual one. A Moslem would know it by the fleshly gyrations of its houris, dwelt upon deliciously elsewhere:

> And all my days are trances,
> And all my nightly dreams

Orgies

Are where thy dark eye glances,
  And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
  By what eternal streams!

Observe the cunning of "ethereal dances." This poet has many tricks by means of which he revels in a triumph of the flesh before our eyes, but his favorite trick is a delineation of his Bacchanals as ethereal sprites, celestial voluptuaries whose thrills are those of sex:

For her soul gives me sigh for sigh.

Another of his devices is to drag in the circumstance that the parties to the orgy are in wedlock, and this difficulty he negotiates with miraculous refinement:

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride.

Death to Poe is a tempting portal to the delights of Tarquin, and Death, like the unchaste Poe himself, is ever in quest of a beautiful young woman. Herein resides the heart of this poet's mystery. The Anglo-

Saxon world does not endure a poetical expression of Poe's frenzy, except in symbol. Death provided that. Poe seems on one occasion, it is true, to welcome Death as a liberator from the flames of his flesh:

> And oh! of all tortures,
> That torture the worst
> Has abated—the terrible
> Torture of thirst
> For the napthaline river
> Of Passion accurst!

How greatly said!

He is dead, this most carnal of the poets, dead and in his grave, there giving thanks for his release from the fury of his being. Yet, after a few stanzas, he permits himself the most exquisite, the most alluring, the most delicate and delicious of all the obscenities in poetry:

> Drowned in a bath
> Of the tresses of Annie!

Of all the poets who have used the English tongue, to repeat, Poe is the most erotic.

Ulalume

"Ulalume" is one illustration, and by no means the most striking.

In its opening stanza, the poet is disclosed near a dank tarn. His heart is aflame but he has taken refuge from the passions consuming him by a desperate appeal to the noble side of him, to his own soul. St. Anthony did not burn in the desert like Poe in that region of Weir:

> Here once, through an alley Titanic
> Of cypress, I roamed with my soul—
> Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
> These were days when my heart was volcanic
> As the scoriac rivers that roll,
> As the lavas that restlessly roll
> Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
> In the ultimate climes of the pole,
> That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
> In the realms of the boreal pole.

In the next lines we ascertain that the poet had never a suspicion of the form to be assumed by the temptation, the terrible temptation, lurking in these realms of memory and imagination. He is in communion with his soul:

Our talk had been serious and sober,
But our thoughts they were palsied and sere,
Our memories were treacherous and sere,
For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year,
(Ah, night of all nights in the year!)
We noted not the dim lake of Auber
(Though once we had journeyed down here),
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Now the temptation begins its work of suggestion. The moon! Poe cannot see it or think of it without prophetic raptures of the flesh. But I must not anticipate. What an exquisite moonrise we get! I know of nothing to equal this in all literature:

And now, as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn,
As the star-dials hinted of morn,
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn,
Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

The Moon!

The spectacle of the moon sets the poet gloating in the voluptuary's characteristic way for the moon is no symbol of cold purity to him. The suggestion is that of the flames within him, of those lavas:

> And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:
> She rolls through an ether of sighs,
> She revels in a region of sighs:
> She has seen that the tears are not dry on
> These cheeks, where the worm never dies.
> And has come past the stars of the Lion
> To point us the path to the skies,
> To the Lethean peace of the skies:
> Come up, in despite of the Lion,
> To shine on us with her bright eyes

The moon has come forth from her cloud through that part of the sky in which the wonderful constellation burns. The worm of passion never dies on the cheek of Poe's fancy, over which it crawls redly. At the climax of the physical transports occasioned by the rise of our satellite the nobler side of his nature, his very soul, addresses its appeal that he resist

William Dean Howells

Astarte, a carnal aspect of the thing shining in the sky:

> Come up through the lair of the Lion,
> With love in her luminous eyes."
> But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
> Said—"Sadly this star I mistrust,
> Her pallor I strangely mistrust:
> Oh, hasten!—oh, let us not linger!
> Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must."
> In terror she spoke, letting sink her
> Wings until they trailed in the dust;

But the passions of Poe rage more redly as he gloats upon that moon, no Diana of a moon but an Astarte! He conquers the scruples of his better nature and rushes into an extreme of the carnal. A triumph of the flesh in Poe is symbolized always through the medium of death or the tomb:

> In agony sobbed, letting sink her
> Plumes till they trailed in the dust,
> Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.
> Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
> And tempted her out of her gloom,
> And conquered her scruples and gloom;
> And we passed to the end of the vista,

Worm

But were stopped by the door of a tomb,
By the door of a legended tomb;
And I said—"What is written, sweet sister,
On the door of this legended tomb?"
She replied—"Ulalume—Ulalume—
'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!"

Ulalume is the name of the fair being with whom Poe associates himself in this tale of a triumph of the flesh. It is no part of Poe's plan to have us take the tomb literally any more than we took that worm literally a while ago:

These cheeks, where the worm never dies.

On the other hand, the lady is "lost," that is, lost to Poe. She was a woman he had loved guiltily. That is obvious from the alarm into which his soul is plunged as the moon rises, inflaming his passion, of which Ulalume is the object. He had striven to put her from his mind. He had forgotten her for an instant. He thought he had left the dank tarn of sensualism. He must close with the confession;

William Dean Howells

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
As the leaves that were crispéd and sere,
As the leaves that were withering with sere,
And I cried—"It was surely October
On this very night of last year
That I journeyed—I journeyed down here,
That I brought a dead burden down here;
On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon has tempted me here!
Well I know now this dim lake of Auber,
This misty mid region of Weir;
Well I know now this dank tarn of Auber,
This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

Nevertheless, we have these native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin insisting that Poe never dealt in sex! Their comprehension of him is sufficiently indicated by that one detail, proven up to the hilt by the new psychology. Poe conveys to us a sense of the unreality of all that in the world of Howells passes for the solid rock. That is, subconsciously, the explanation of the Howells attitude to Poe, and by the Howells attitude I refer to the "school." Such a school! I read a preface to a tale by one of its members in the course of which he

boasted of it as a record of a cowboy life that had passed away. Such was its claim to immortality as a work of art. There was not the slightest effort at an interpretation of life in the work, no grasp upon the meaning of anything, no seizure of the soul of circumstance. Towns were "shot up" and meals were eaten at frontier boarding houses and a "heroine" was "loved." Such is the garbage purveyed by the Howells school at its worst and Howells himself has the artlessness to praise it in his volume called "Literature and Life." Luckily, the critics of the school he despises do not retort in the spirit of his own attitude to Poe. It is imbecile to deny that the art of Howells is great, frankly British to set him below Hardy or Meredith. Only a genius of the highest order, though handicapped by the limitations of the native American of Anglo-Saxon origin, could have given us "The Rise of Silas Lapham," have created a whole family of Coreys, have painted a Marcia Hubbard. And what if Howells be a

William Dean Howells

native American of Anglo-Saxon origin? Homer was blind. Coleridge was a slave to opium. Poe drank.

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THOSE of my readers who have been reared in the British literary superstition will expect me to have compiled this index in the approved style of Doctor Dryasdust. It happens that I have long suffered at the hands of the makers of indexes and I strive to give those hacks a lead. Let them throw off the shackles of the superstition that makes their efforts vain and give us indexes that we shall want to read for their pith, their point, their provocativeness. Thunder in the index—yes!

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no such literary center as Boston was. Boston itself has perhaps outgrown the literary consciousness which formerly distinguished it from all our other large towns. In a place of nearly a million people (I count in the outlying places) newspapers must be more than books; and that alone says everything." A glimpse into the city of caste. 87

Boston. In my opinion Howells is great only to the extent that he deals with this city and with the people native to it, including the hinterland of Boston, that is, the New England states and the New England people. I think Howells was sensible of this when he wrote: "I doubt if anywhere in the world there was ever so much taste and feeling for literature as there was in that Boston. At Edinburgh (as I imagine it) there was a large and distinguished literary class, and at Weimar there was a cultivated court circle; but in Boston there was not only such a group of authors as we shall hardly see here again for hundreds of years, but there was such regard for them and their calling, not only in good society, but among the extremely well-read people of the whole intelligent city, as hardly another community has shown." I am afraid Howells lost terribly except from the financial standpoint by his desertion of Boston for New York. I wish I had said this. 33

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Brownell, William Crary. My note on him will be more intelligible if I insert here a fragment from his book, a very little one, on criticism: "Reality has become recognized as the one vital element of significant art, and it seems unlikely that the unreal will ever regain the empire it once possessed. Its loss, at all events, is not ours, since it leaves us the universe. But it is obvious that 'realism' is often in practice, and not infrequently in conception, a very imperfect treatment of reality, which indeed not rarely receives more sympathetic attention in the romantic or even the classic household. Balzac is a realist, and at times the most artificial of great romancers. George Sand is a romanticist, and a very deep and fundamental reality not rarely underlies her superficial extravagances. Fundamentally, truth—which is certainly none other than reality—was her inspiration, as, fundamentally, it certainly was not always Balzac's." This kind of thing makes me sick even if W. C. Brownell did write it. 29

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Coreys. "Bromfield Corey," Howells tells us, "was to come back and go into business after a time, but he never did so. He travelled about over Europe, and travelled handsomely, frequenting good society everywhere, and getting himself presented at several courts, at a period when it was a distinction to do so. He had always sketched, and with his father's leave he fixed himself at Rome, where he remained studying art and rounding the being inherited from his Yankee progenitors, till there was very little left of the ancestral angularities. After ten years he came home and painted that portrait of his father. It was very good, if a little amateurish, and he might have made himself a name as a painter of portraits if he had not had so much money. But he had plenty of money, though by this time he was married and beginning to have a family. It was absurd for him to paint portraits for pay, and ridiculous to paint them for nothing; so he did not paint them at all. He continued a dilettante." Their attitude to efficiency. 125

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DOCTOR BREEN'S PRACTICE. This novel is rather short but it is a masterpiece of literary art. 30

DOCTOR DRYASDUST. A glimpse into his soul. 187

DOCTOR DRYASDUST. Hail to our good old friend. 107

DOCTOR MULBRIDGE. "I don't know," his mother said, "as she'd call you what they call a gentleman." Some observations upon the theme. 83

DON JUAN. He did not know women so well. 134

DOSTOIEVSKY. I think myself courageous in pronouncing him in the main unreadable. 178

DOWSON, ERNEST. His Cynara was not more to him than Howell's Marcia is to me. 76

DRINK. The word has an honored place in the history of literature owing to the misfortunes of Edgar Allan Poe. 232

DRUNK. Difficulty of managing a character in a novel when he is inebriated is extreme. I find Howells refined, artistic, perfect, in dealing with the emergency. 75

EDITOR. "I think it a great pity," says Howells, "that editors ever deal other than frankly with young contributors, or put them off with smooth generalities of excuse, instead of saying they do not like this thing or that offered them. It is impossible to make a criticism of all rejected manuscripts, but in the case of those which show promise I think it is quite possible; and if I were to sin my sins over again, I think I should sin a little more on the side of candid severity." Howells in that capacity scored. 196

EDITOR. Literature of no particular importance to him. 194

EDITOR. Swagger as he may about New York, he is an in-

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competent and an imbecile. 198

EDITOR. Why he clings to his formula. 193

EDITOR, THE. One of his imbecilities. 192

EDDY, MARY BAKER G. A Christian Science view of her life and another view. 190

EDDY, MRS. She is a good deal more of a poet than most of her readers suspect. I know that her verses are deficient in artistry but she had a wealth of poetical ideas and they are embodied in her prose. 60

EGERIA. It was Ford who loved her. 128

EGERIA. This Howells heroine ranks with me right after Marcia. Egeria is one of those peculiarly inscrutable New England types. She is not as overwhelming as Margaret Cooper in the "Beauchampe" of W. Gilmore Simms, who is, by all odds, the most intense heroine in American fiction. The tale of "Beauchampe" is not as great as the heroine but in the case of Egeria, the heroine and her story are equally great. 46

EGOIST, THE. That novel is great but less great than the "Rise of Silas Lapham." 147

ELEANOR HARDING. Her plan to meet Bold. 173

ELIZABETH, AGE OF. It has passed away and we fail to remember that. 21

ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, ST. I am afraid I don't know as much about her as my allusion implies. 60

EMILY. I refer to the heroine of "The Mysteries of Udolpho," the young lady who read such quantities of Ariosto and Tasso and swooned in the arms of this man and that. You may laugh at her but I never get out of touch with Emily. I offer no apology for inserting in this place an old wood cut of the young lady from an edition of "The Mysteries of Udolpho" brought out early in the last century. And this is the terrible romanticism against which Howells protests!

ENGLAND. It has heard of Howells. 24

ENGLAND. Remarkable fact that she makes American opinion on all topics related to literature and even the arts and sciences. 9

ENGLISH, THE. How they love us! Howells saw through them and his opinion is given. 12

William Dean Howells

ENGLISH, THE. Their greatest artists unknown to themselves until the foreigner points them out. 10

ENGLISH. Their mind a second rate one. 3

ENGLISHMAN, IMPORTANT YOUNG. This is an old game in literature, worked again and again upon the American reading public. 22

EPIGRAM. One encounters it rarely in Howells. 113

ETIQUETTE. "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is a manual of that polite mystery. 211

EURIPIDES. He has a touch of Howells. 143

EURIPIDES. We all steal from him. 100

EVANSES. They were not the right kind. 117

FABRE, HENRI. He suggests

EMILY IN THE CASTLE OF UDOLPHO

"Does anyone now read Mrs. Radcliffe," asks Andrew Lang, "or am I the only wanderer in her windy corridors, listening timidly to groans and hollow voices, and shielding the flame of a lamp which, I fear, will presently flicker out and leave me in the darkness?"

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the manner of Howells although he dealt with insects and Howells does not—in the dictionary sense. Yet the character studies of Howells make one thing of the Fabre studies of grasshoppers, beetles, and all those things. 46

FAMILY. The cult of the family is the thing Howells takes over from the Victorians. 112

FENTON, LIEUTENANT. His way of love. 141

FILLMORE, PRESIDENT. A respectable character. 165

FLAUBERT. He can be set too high. 110

FLAUBERT. His art is less finished than that of "The Rise of Silas Lapham." 147

FREEDOM OF SPEECH. Hostility of Americans to. 92

GENIUS. Our women seem to have more of it than our men but our women are not so exclusively Anglo-Saxon. 61

GENIUS. That of a woman is not like that of a man. 60

GENIUS. The Briton with none. 22

GENIUS. The possession of it makes a man a grotesque character in the Howells world. 84

GEORGE ELIOT. Is she greater than Dickens? 185

GEORGE ELIOT. She had a conscience, it seems. 99

GEORGE ELIOT. She is untrue to life in dealing with her heroes. 79

GEORGE ELIOT. She is very good, especially in "Adam Bede," but she can not hold a candle to Howells. 27

GEORGE ELIOT. She went to live with George Henry Lewes. If it had not all happened so long ago it would be a scandal, wouldn't it? 99

GEORGIAN. The period comprehended under that term is another excuse for a superstition in our own unfortunate country. 21

GERFAUT. "Once at least, however, in 'Gerfaut,' Charles de Bernard seems to have felt the impulse to grasp a subject nearer its roots," says Henry James. "In spite of a number of signs of immaturity, this is his solidest and most effective work. His tales are usually comedies; this is a tragedy. The reader cares little for his hero, who is a gentleman of a type excessively familiar in French literature—a distinguished man of letters, of restless imagination,

who comes down to the Château de Bergenheim for the express purpose of seducing its pretty mistress, and who, when installed among its comforts, and smothered in hospitality by the husband, proceeds in the most scientific manner to bombard the affections of the wife. Nor are we much more interested in Madame de Bergenheim herself, who surrenders after a barely nominal siege and without having at all convinced us that her affections are worth possessing. But the book, in spite of a diffuseness of which afterward the author was rarely guilty, is written with infinite spirit and point, and some of the subordinate figures are forcibly and wittily sketched." It is a great book as a specimen of the Balzac school, and that is all. 205

German Historians. I don't know that my impressions of them are very accurate. 39

Ghost. This character is responsible, I fancy, for the comparative neglect of Shakespeare by Howells. 171

Gibbon, Edward. His history is very absorbing. I devoted days and days to its perusal and my interest never flagged. I might have said this in a note after the ponderous British fashion. 40

God. His alleged responsibility for the fact that the English are better writers than the Americans. 4

Goldsmith, Oliver. His genius and that of Howells are surprisingly alike. 153

Goriot. His bedside halts me. 147

Gospel, The Howells. He sums it up himself. 171

Grace Breen. How she looked at a crisis. 201

Hamlet. Style a reason for the popularity of Hamlet as a closet play. 107

Hamlet. The ghost in that play disliked. 171

Hamlet. The real lesson of that great play. Howells says something about Hamlet so good that I must drag it in somehow: "The strongest reason against any woman Hamlet is that it does violence to an ideal. Literature is not so rich in great imaginary masculine types that we can afford to have them transformed to women; and after seeing Mme. Bernhardt's Hamlet no one can altogether

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liberate himself from the fancy that the Prince of Denmark was a girl of uncertain age, with crises of mannishness in which she did not seem quite a lady. Hamlet is in nothing more a man than in the things to which as a man he found himself unequal; for as a woman he would have been easily superior to them." 215

HARVARD. That noble institution is incidentally mentioned. I might add here that it is the bulwark of the superstition against which this study is a protest. 1

HEINE, HEINRICH. A profound remark of his. 67

HEINE. Howells must love him. He brings him into "A Hazard of New Fortunes" but I have had no space to do more than name the man. 56

HELEN HARKNESS. A model of inefficiency and hence very American. 121

HELEN HARKNESS. Her discussion of democracy. 165

HELEN HARKNESS. She knew only the best people. 117

HELEN HARKNESS. Tiresomeness as her trait. 123

"HELLO, MIKE!" I think the illustration afforded me by the salutation is felicitous. 36

HERO AND LEANDER. How they crop up or rather how their sad fate suggests itself whenever one's theme is love. 46

HERO, THE. Woman's worship of him. 135

HISTORIANS. A comparison of their equipment with that of the novelists. 38

HOKUSAI. The great Japanese artist is not appreciated by his country's aristocracy, but who is? I don't mean that I know much about Japanese color prints. 25

HOMER. He has to be brought in, too, like Poe. I think the reference to him appropriate in the circumstances. 15

HOMER. He was blind. So is Howells, to some things. 232

HOTTENTOT. A. What he suggests intellectually. 8

HOWELLS, W. D. He introduces himself into one of his novels. 176

HOWELLS. WILLIAM DEAN. I have purposely refrained from anything in the nature of a biographical study of the man's life. I have not set out to emulate Doctor Dryasdust.

William Dean Howells

I have an idea, of course, that Howells was born in Ohio, that his father was an editor. I have gathered that Howells set type for a living or at any rate worked at the case—as it would have been called then. He drifted from newspaper work into literature. Now mark. He never went to college. That is why he never fell under the spell of the British literary superstition. Had he gone to college he would have lost all capacity to use that wonderful style of his. He toiled as a novelist in Boston and he won for himself a position that Balzac might have envied. In an evil hour Howells came down to New York. He went to work for the house of Harper. God forbid that I should say an ill natured thing, but what can have induced Howells to enter the pay of the Harpers? Was it money? I suppose so. Well, that house of Harper put the blight of its own literary superstitions—all British—upon Howells and to that extent it ruined the author. It paid the man well. This is the life history of Howells as I read it. What occasion was there to spread it in indignant prose from one chapter to another? Some day I shall sit down to write the life of Howells, I suppose. In the meantime I suggest that my reader go over again that last chapter—the excuse and the occasion of this volume. 200

Howells, William Dean. If this index were compiled in the heavy, dull, preposterous British fashion, I suppose I would have a column or two under this heading with a forest of figures and the effect would be insufferably dull to a general reader. As I have hinted, I want this to be a readable and lively index. Let me say that the book in your hands is on the subject of Howells. If you want to find out some detail look under the appropriate heading and if you fail to find it, I can only say that I am sorry. 1

Hubbard, Bartley. He is a wretched newspaper man and he amounts to nothing. 127

Hubbard, Bartley. The lamp Marcia carried lights him up. 73

Humor. The sense in woman is revealed by Howells as by no other writer except Jane Austen. 71

Ideas. Inadequacy of the

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native American head to anything of the sort. 156

Ideas. Never put them into a woman's head. 142

Ideas. The hostility of the Howells world to these is remarkable and American. 84

Important Young Englishman. He bobs up. He is the oldest trick in the publisher's box. 22

Indian Summer. Middle age is its theme. 137

Indian Summer. The fair young lady in this book is not to be blamed for falling in love with a middle aged man. To tell the truth the love of a young girl for a middle aged man ought to be encouraged—that is, if the middle aged man be single or a widower. 50

Irene Lapham. Consider her fate. 136

Irene Lapham. "She was a very pretty figure of a girl, after our fashion of girls, round and slim and flexible, and her face was admirably regular. But her great beauty—and it was very great—was in her coloring. This was of an effect for which there is no word but delicious, as we use it of fruit or flowers. She had red hair, like her father in his earlier days, and the tints of her cheeks and temples were such as suggested May-flowers and apple-blossoms and peaches. Instead of the gray that often dulls this complexion, her eyes were of a blue at once intense and tender, and they seemed to burn on what they looked at with a soft, lambent flame." Her beauty distracts us all. 150

Irene Lapham. Her entry into her sister's room. 146

Irene Lapham. Her style and her dress. 182

Jameson, Mrs. One more woman who is too much neglected. Let me set down here a remark of hers that ought to have been quoted in the text: "Where the vivacity of the intellect and the strength of the passions exceed the development of the moral faculties, the character is likely to be imbittered or corrupted by extremes, either of adversity or prosperity. This is especially the case with women; but as far as my own observation and experience go, I should say that many more women have their heads turned by prosperity than their hearts spoiled by adversity; and, in general, the female character rises with

the pressure of ill fortune." Mrs. Jameson knew her sex wonderfully well. 60

JESUS. He won the love of more women than Don Juan ever did. 134

JESUS. One effect of the study of his gospel. 172

JEWETT, SARAH ORNE. I don't give a fig for her but Howells seems to think her great. 171

JOAN OF ARC. She seems to have known as much about military science as a member of the general staff. However, she was inspired and military commanders are not, as a rule. 60

JOHN BOLD. He is a character in Trollope's "Warden" and he is brought in for good reasons. 173

JULIET. Shakespeare's, of course. 72

KEATS, JOHN. 109

KENTON. MISS. This Howells young lady illustrates another remark of Mrs. Jameson's: "O me! how many women since the days of Echo and Narcissus, have pined themselves into air for the love of men who were in love only with themselves!" The affair of Miss Kenton proves it. 66

KENTONS, THE. This novel is a marvel of effective dialogue. 113.

KIPLING, RUDYARD. I suppose his vogue will at no distant day inspire the wonder we now feel at the vogue of Southey in days long past and gone. 27

KORAN, THE. Poe's paradise in Mahomet's. 222

LADY. The type in Howells. 112

LADY MACBETH. The insight of Shakespeare in her case ought to put the realists to the blush. 203

LADY NOVELISTS. A jibe at them all. 55

LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK, THE. I once had a hot dispute with Frank Harris about this novel. I believe he could not read it. I told him to get "A Modern Instance," but Harris never told me what he thought of it. I defend "The Lady of the Aroostook" as perfect. 47

LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK, THE. It has a moral. 136

LAPHAM. The girls of the family. 143

LAPHAM. The sisters of this famous family are beautifully delineated. 181

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LEATHERWOOD GOD, THE. A remarkable exhibition of power as a novel, but I must confess that it deals with its theme in a way I am not very much disposed to like. 200

LEMUEL BARKER. The tragic position of this real poet whose genius was not suspected by his creator, Howells, appeals to me. 96

LIBBY, MR. He is the representative Howells young man, a specimen of the breed to which young Corey belongs. 81

LIBERTY. Americans distrust it. 162

LIES. Never tell them to a woman. She will tell them to you by the score, of course. 139

LIFE. A dissertation upon living it. 57

LIFE. It is too large for our formulas. Howells has never learned this. 172

LIFE. It must be deemed a curtain behind which the school of Howells never gets. 208

LILY MAYHEW. She knew what love was, at any rate. The observation can be made with impunity of any Howells heroine. 66

LITERARY MEN. They ape the English and they are deemed ridiculous, absurd, preposterous, a joke. 23

LITERATURE. It is the subject of much flubdub, flimflam and flapdoodle. 17

LITERATURE. Its accidental relation to editorial policy. 194

LITERATURE. The big word made ridiculous by the English. 3

LITERATURE AND LIFE. An exhibition of noble powers misapplied. 231

LITERATURE AND LIFE. The name of the book in which Howells reveals his incapacity as a critic in the most complete fashion. 195

LONDON. Its pontifically final attitude to ourselves in literature. 20

LOVE. Never is it ridiculous in Howells, keen as is his humor in dealing with the theme. 108

LOVE. Woman and her attitude to it. 132

LOVE. Woman is never afraid of that. 138

LUCULLUS, DINING WITH. The allusion is hardly worth the trouble of an entry but I make it the basis of a fresh protest against the wooden fashion of indexing every

proper name and running a figure after it. The publishers ought to be ashamed of the indexes to their books. 15

LYDIA BLOOD. She is the young lady who takes that famous voyage in the Aroostook. I don't know why she fascinates me so. 47

LYDIA GWILT. She is the heroine of Wilkie Collins's novel of "Armadale." 212

MAGAZINES. Ours have done more for British novelists than they have done for American novelists. 194

MAINE. This state was very well known to Howells and I like to dwell upon his treatment of its scenes and its people. 33

MANNERS. Ours are studied effectively. 115

MARCIA. Howells does gloat over her physical aspect. "She thus showed a smooth, low forehead, lips and cheeks deeply red, a softly rounded chin touched with a faint dimple, and in turn a nose short and aquiline; her eyes were dark, and her dusky hair flowed crinkling above her fine black brows, and vanished down the curve of a lovely neck. There was a peculiar charm in the form of her upper lip: it was exquisitely arched, and at the corners it projected a little over the lower lip, so that when she smiled it gave a piquant sweetness to her mouth, with a certain demure innocence that qualified the Roman pride of her profile. For the rest, her beauty was of the kind that coming years would only ripen and enrich; at thirty she would be even handsomer than at twenty, and be all the more southern in her type for the paling of that northern color in her cheeks." 72

MARCIA. If I could only do justice to her! 69

MARCIA. She can not be delineated by a second rate novelist. 74

MARCIA. She is mentioned here in a running fashion, in conjunction with other Howells characters. In Marcia, too, I detect a resemblance to the Margaret Cooper of W. Gilmore Simms. To me the effect of intensity in the character of Margaret Cooper and the effect of intensity in the character of Marcia Hubbard are suggestive, stimulating. Is intensity the American feminine note? 49

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MARCIA. She is New England to the backbone. 72

MARK TWAIN. He made a very just remark on the subject of the technique of Howells. 48

MARRYAT, CAPTAIN. I read him with much interest when I was a boy. He never wrote a tale of the sea that can compare with Moby Dick—but Moby Dick was written by an American and hence we can't rate it at its true value. 48

MARY MAGDALEN. The fine genius of Howells is symbolized by her spiritualization. 110

MASCULINE. The failure of our genius to grasp the significance of the term. 183

MASTERPIECE. The word is applicable to "The Rise of Silas Lapham" which contains the most tremendous episode in fiction. 145

MAUPASSANT, GUY DE. What English writer of tales can approach him? 7

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MEREDITH, GEORGE. Dialogue as he uses it compared with that of Howells again. 71

MEREDITH, GEORGE. His inferiority to Howells in some points. 71

MEREDITH, GEORGE. His inferiority to Howells is not discerned because Meredith is English and Howells is an American. 151

MEREDITH, GEORGE. That swimming scene of his. 145

METHODIST. His idea of criticism. 190

MEXICO. The allusion is to the famous work of Prescott. 39

MIDDLE CLASS ENGLISHMAN. That is the ideal for which the American republic stands. 89

MILTON, JOHN. Since this is an index, I must at least set down his name. 57

MISSISSIPPI. That sublime river is mentioned by way of illustration. In the average index the name would be set down and a number would follow it. This is too absurd. Such are the consequences of following a British literary example. 1

MONTAGUE. This is a famous name and its appearance

in the circumstances is inevitable. 149

Montoni. Let me explain for the benefit of the young that he is the heavy villain in "The Mysteries of Udolpho." I admire him immensely. "This Signor Montoni had an air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit and strengthened by talents, to which every person seemed involuntarily to yield. The quickness of his perceptions was strikingly expressed on his countenance; yet that countenance could submit implicitly to occasion; and more than once in this day the triumph of art over nature might have been discerned in it. His visage was long, and rather narrow, yet he was called handsome; and it was, perhaps, the spirit and vigor of his soul, sparkling through his features, that triumphed for him." 73

Moon, The. Poe makes the satellite guilty. 222

Mulbridge, Doctor. He wasn't a gentleman in the Howells sense and that had its consequences. 83

Musset, Alfred de. His name occurs to one, naturally, in talking of the thing called morality. 56

My Literary Passions. A dig at the dunces in. 9

My Literary Passions. Read it with caution. 205

Native American. Poverty of his mind when he is of Anglo-Saxon origin. 203

Nelson, Horatio. His position as a lover. 139

Nemesis. We all have one and that is the one referred to. 71

New England. Its interpreter in literature is the only Howells. 82

Newspaper. Its relation to American literature is discussed with some candor but the matter will be found cropping up here and there as the pages are turned. 19

New York. I wonder if Howells ever knew it. 212

Nile. I am surprised to find that I have mentioned it but casually and only once. 139

Novel. It deteriorates in the British Isles. 169

Novel, Great American. I really have said nothing about it but I wish to note a passing reference. 24

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OBSCENITY. This quality in Poe deserves careful study, which I attempt. 224

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ORLANDO. This creation of Ariosto's is not too preposterous to reflect life. 170

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PASSION. What it signifies and implies. 173

PAUL. His observation on the great passion. 172

PECK, HARRY THURSTON. It has always seemed to me that he got very shabby treatment. His book on Prescott is remarkable. 40

PENELOPE LAPHAM. "She was named after her grandmother, who had in her turn inherited from another ancestress the name of the Homeric matron whose peculiar merits won her a place even among the Puritan Faiths, Hopes, Temperances, and Prudences. Penelope was the girl whose odd serious face had struck Bartley Hubbard in the photograph of the family group Lapham showed him on the day of the interview. Her large eyes, like her hair, were brown; they had the peculiar look of near-sighted eyes which is called mooning; her complexion was of a dark pallor." She was the one Corey loved. 146

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PHILISTINISM. Its unblushing and unconscious character in Howells. 109

PHILISTINISM. There is a braying kind as well as a sneering kind. 20

PHILISTINISMS. We get ours from the English, there being no one else to get any from. 15

PLOT. A historian needs it just as if he were a novelist. 39

POE, EDGAR ALLAN. Why America could not assimilate the poor fellow. 90

POE, EDGAR ALLAN. Condescension of Dickens to. 4

POE, EDGAR ALLAN. Folly

of belittling him. Henry James can actually say: "With all due respect to the very original genius of the author of the 'Tales of Mystery,' it seems to us that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one's self. An enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection." But Saintsbury says: "Whoso thinks little of Poe, let him suspect that he knows about as little of poetry, and, therefore, for fear of accidents, had better say nothing about it." 216

Poe, Edgar Allan. He says the passions should be held in reverence. 172

Poe, Edgar Allan. He, too, revolted from the British literary superstition. 167

Poe, Edgar Allan. His contempt for epics is a source of regret to me. 15

Poe, Edgar Allan. His whole work dismissed as beneath contempt in a London organ of imbecility in literature. 9

Poe, Edgar Allan. Imbecility of Howells in dismissing so great a writer as an incompetent critic. 206

Poe, Edgar Allan. Inferiority of every English writer of tales to that great genius. 6

Poe, Edgar Allan. Is it possible to write on the topic of literature in general without referring to him constantly? Certainly, I have had occasion to mention him again and again because the glory of his genius sheds a glow upon whatever page his name adorns. 12

Poe, Edgar Allan. I suggest an explanation of the hostility of Howells to this genius. 219

Poe, Edgar Allan. I try to compare him with Wordsworth—a difficult as well as a bold undertaking. 57

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Poe, Edgar Allan. The fact that he was discovered by the French explains his fame in his own country. He was not discovered by the English. 26

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Prescott, W. H. I see the "modern" historians are trying to destroy his reputation. The men who have no imagination and no fancy always revenge themselves in that style upon the man who has. 40

Prescott, W. H. Is he a historian? 115

President of the United States, The. I have discussed no constitutional question—a passing allusion, that is all, and I suppose I might have omitted even that. 35

Psychoanalysis. What Howells says of some literary themes may have to be revised in the light of this science. I do not mean to speak cocksurely. I am not an authority on the subject. There are hints in the science that upset the dominant school in our literature. 202

Psychology. It throws a new light upon some of the points raised by Howells. 201

Purity. The effect of it in women as conveyed by Howells. 63.

Quack. His rare privileges in the United States when he happens to be English. 11

Quality of Mercy, The. This is one of the interesting novels. I have not found it necessary to take every book Howells wrote and serve it up as if I were compiling a dictionary of Howells. I am writing a running commentary and an interpretation in the way of exemplifying my own views of literature. (I say this here instead of writing a preface.) 200

Radcliffe, Mrs. Anne. I dislike to dismiss a novelist who has so vastly interested me in the hasty fashion into which I was driven by the rush of my ideas. How I wish some of the preposterous New York publishers would bring out a complete edition of her breathless tales. There was an English writer who could use the language as if it were something more than a bucket of water to be emptied upon the head of each theme lifting itself into timeliness. 45

Rainford, Lord. We poor

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Americans knock him over. 127

Rastignac. I accompany him into the boudoir of Madame de Nucingen. 73

Raven, The, No New York editor would condescend to bow to the shabby object who wrote it. 198

Reade, Charles. Howells gives him a black eye, speaking metaphorically. 98

Realism. His praises of it and his censures of romanticism. 153

Realism. Howells insists that he is devoted to it. I deny that. 53

Realism. It is with Howells simply a feminine attitude to life. He loves the ladies. 184

Realism. There is a good reason for the attitude of Howells to that. 100

Remebrandt. He had something in common with Howells. 67

Repression. The Howells world might be called one in which this prevails and is practiced. 213

Richardson, Samuel. Oh! what a shame it is that "Clarissa Harlowe" is so hard to get in an edition a poor man can buy complete. 69

Rise of Silas Lapham, The. Its superiority as a national asset to the whole taxable value of the city of New York. 2

Rise of Silas Lapham, The. Just a word about it. 49

Robinson Crusoe. I can not omit mention of that footprint in the sand. 145

Romanticistic. To show what a fool Howells can be on this subject, I quote from his "Literature and Life," a poor hodge-podge: "There is also a sentimentality, or pseudo-emotionality (I have not the right phrase for it), which awaits full recognition in fiction. This efflorescence from the dust of systems and creeds, carried into natures left vacant by the ancestral doctrine, has scarcely been noticed by the painters of New England manners. It is often a last state of Unitarianism, which prevailed in the larger towns and cities when the Calvinistic theology ceased to be dominant, and it is often an effect of the spiritualism so common in New England, and, in fact, everywhere in America." The word "romanticistic" is Howells's own. 184

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Sissy, The. It is amazing to observe how Howells raves over the sissies. For instance: "At Boston, or near Boston, live those artists supreme in the kind of short story which we have carried so far: Miss Jewett, Miss Wilkins, Miss Alice Brown, Mrs. Chase-Wyman, and Miss Gertrude Smith, who comes from Kansas, and writes of the prairie farm-life, though she leaves Mr. E. W. Howe (of *The Story of a Country Town* and presently of the *Atchison Daily Globe*) to constitute, with the humorous poet Ironquill, a frontier literary center at Topeka. Of Boston, too, though she is of western Pennsylvania origin, is Mrs. Margaret Deland, one of our most successful novelists. Miss Wilkins has married out of Massachusetts into New Jersey, and is the neighbor of Mr. H. M. Alden at Metuchen." And so on and so forth! What she has done in literature. 178

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Slope, Mr. He is a very effective character in "Barchester Towers," by Anthony Trollope. The shameless and beautiful lady beside whom he sat on the sofa was Charlotte Stanhope, or La Signora Madeline Vesey Neroni: "The beauty of her face was uninjured, and that beauty was of a peculiar kind. Her copious rich brown hair was worn in Grecian *bandeaux* round her head, displaying as much as possible of her forehead and cheeks. Her forehead, though rather low, was very beautiful from its perfect contour and pearly whiteness. Her eyes were long and large, and marvelously bright; might I venture to say, bright as Lucifer's, I should perhaps best express the depth of their brilliancy.

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They were dreadful eyes to look at, such as would absolutely deter any man of quiet mind and easy spirit from attempting a passage of arms with such foes. There was talent in them, and the fire of passion and the play of wit, but there was no love. Cruelty was there instead, and courage, a desire of masterhood, cunning, and a wish for mischief. And yet, as eyes, they were very beautiful. The eyelashes were long and perfect, and the long steady unabashed gaze, with which she would look into the face of her admirer, fascinated while it frightened him. She was a basilisk from whom an ardent lover of beauty could make no escape. Her nose and mouth and teeth and chin and neck and bust were perfect, much more so at twenty-eight than they had been at eighteen." Altogether a remarkable character to run across in a novel. And the things she did! 76

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ciated by critics of literature as it should be. 44

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TROLLOPE, ANTHONY. His intimacy is contrasted with that of Howells. Personally I like intimate writers but I think the trait is appreciated mainly by the sophisticated class of readers. In writing

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for the young one must not risk too great a degree of intimacy. Young people don't like intimacy—in the good sense—as much as do their elders. I make these observations because I say something else in the text. 34

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TURGENIEFF. "He belongs to the limited class of very careful writers," says Henry James. "It is to be admitted at the outset that he is a zealous genius, rather than an abundant one. His line is narrow observation. He has not the faculty of rapid, passionate, almost reckless improvisation—that of Walter Scott, of Dickens, of George Sand. This is an immense charm in a story-teller; on the whole, to our sense, the greatest. Turgenieff lacks it; he charms us in other ways. To describe him in the fewest terms, he is a story-teller who has taken notes." He is not as great as our classic. 110

TURGENIEFF. "The Russians, among whom fiction flourishes vigorously, deem him their greatest artist," to quote Henry James again. "His tales are not numerous, and many of them are very short. He gives us the impression of writing much more for love than for lucre. He is particularly a favorite with people of cultivated taste; and nothing, in our opinion, cultivates the taste more than to read him." His position then is that of artist. 178

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UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, THE. Snow is made much of in this masterpiece. Snow is finely handled in "A Modern Instance." I suspect Howells is fond of snow. *52*

UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, THE. Words can convey no

idea of the exquisite poetry of the effects attained by Howells in this novel. His differentiation of the several male characters is very convincing, very humorous. 45

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. It is highly respectable. 165

UNIVERSITY, AMERICAN. Its subservience to the great literary superstition. 10

VALERIE MARNEFFE. I allow myself the luxury of another quotation from dear Henry James: "Never is he [Balzac] more himself than among his coquettes and courtesans, among Madame Schontz and Josépha, Madame Marneffe and Madame de Rochefide. 'Balzac loves his Valerie,' says M. Taine, speaking of his attitude toward the horrible Madame Marneffe, the depths of whose depravity he is so actively sounding; and paradoxical as it sounds it is perfectly true. She is, according to Balzac's theory of the matter, a consummate Parisienne, and the depravity of a Parisienne is to his sense a more remunerative spectacle than the virtue of any *provinciale*, whether her province be Normandy or Gascony, England or Germany. Never does he so let himself go as in these cases—never does his imagination work so at a heat. Feminine nerves, feminine furbelows, feminine luxury and subtlety, intoxicate and inspire him; he revels among his innumerable heroines like Mahomet in his paradise of houris." You never meet the kind in Howells. The why and the wherefore. 67

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lent illustration of my attitude to Howells and his school. 207

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WHITMAN, WALT. What names one drags in irrelevantly when one is writing literary criticism! I am as bad as William Crary Brownell and he is bad enough. 66

WILDE, OSCAR. His "Glukypikros Eros" ought to have been quoted in the text:

". . . have made my choice, have lived my poems, and though youth is gone in wasted days,

"I have found the lover's crown of myrtle better than the poet's crown of bays."

The word "better" here is less appropriate than the word "sweeter," or so it seems to me. 6

WILFER, MRS. The allusion is to the character in Dickens's novel of "Our Mutual Friend." 14

WILKINS. This is the maiden name of the lady who has since become Mrs. Freeman and whose tales I am sorry I am forced to disparage owing to my objection to the sissy school of literature. Howells has no objection to it, of course. Hear him rave: "Even the power of writing short stories, which we suppose ourselves to have in such excellent degree, has spread from New England. That is, indeed, the home of the American short story, and it has there been brought to such perfection in the work of Miss Wilkins, of Miss Jewett, of Miss Brown. and of that most faithful, forgotten painter of manners, Mrs. Rose Terry Cook, that it presents upon the whole a truthful picture of New England village life in some of its more obvious phases." 171

WOMAN. Howells has a whole philosophy of her. I must say of him what Henry James says of Balzac: "Balzac is supposed to have understood the feminine organism as no one had done before him—to have had the feminine heart, the feminine temperament, feminine nerves, at his fingers' ends—to have turned the feminine puppet, as it were, completely inside out. He has placed an immense number of women on the stage, and even those critics who are least satisfied with his

William Dean Howells

most elaborate female portraits must at least admit that he has paid the originals the compliment to hold that they play an immense part in the world. It may be said, indeed, that women are the keystone of the 'Comédie Humaine.' If the men were taken out, there would be great gaps and fissures; if the women were taken out, the whole fabric would collapse." Observe, however, that Balzac's great women are wicked. Those of Howells are all good. 131

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WOMAN. She feminizes man. Howells makes a striking remark which ought to be pondered: "It seems somehow more permissible for women in imaginary actions to figure as men than for men to figure as women. In the theater we have conjectured how and why this may be, but the privilege, for less obvious reasons, seems yet more liberally granted in fiction. A woman may tell a story in the character of a man and not give offence, but a man cannot write a novel in autobiographical form from the personality of a woman without imparting the sense of something unwholesome." 81

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WORDSWORTH, WILLIAM. His "Daffodils" and his "Ode" afford me material for some reflections which might have been omitted, but after all I wrote this book to satisfy myself. 59

WORDSWORTHIAN WOMAN. Why Marcia is one. 73

YAANEK. I believe this word in Poe's poem of Ulalume to be a key word. The names in the poem—Weir, Auber and so forth—make me suspect that if one had the time and the ingenuity, a cipher of the kind that Poe so loved or at least a cryptogram would be unfolded. There is

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probably some scandal behind the mystery of these lines. 226

YOUNG MAN. "A man," says Howells in his greatest novel, "has not reached the age of twenty-six in any community where he was born and reared without having had his capacity pretty well ascertained; and in Boston the analysis is conducted with an unsparing thoroughness which may fitly impress the un-Bostonian mind, darkened by the popular superstition that the Bostonians blindly admire one another. A man's qualities are sifted as closely in Boston as they doubtless were in Florence or Athens; and, if final mercy was shown in those cities because a man was, with all his limitations, an Athenian or Florentine, some abatement might as justly be made in Boston for like reason." The figure he cuts in the Howells world and the reverence he feels. 140

YOUTH. The greatest crime of which a native American of Anglo-Saxon origin can be guilty. 92

ZEPPELIN. We don't owe that to the English. 7